



March 3, 2021

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB853 – Juvenile Law- Juvenile Justice Reform

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 853. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

According to Human Rights for Kids' report published in 2020, Maryland is tied with five states for being our country's worst offenders of juvenile justice.¹ We need meaningful reforms now. We strongly believe that protecting the rights and well-being of children – especially young Black children who stand to be most impacted by this legislation - in our state needs to be a priority. Black youth make up about 35 percent of the population of 10-17 year olds in Maryland, yet account for nearly two-thirds of the age group arrested and charged in our state.²

According to the Juvenile Justice Reform council, our state currently has no minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction; children as young as 6 have faced arrest, and Maryland excessively arrests pre-adolescent children. In fact, in the past five years, more than 8,600 pre-adolescent children have faced juvenile complaints.

Our state's policies and laws regarding youth incarceration are unethical, costly, ineffective, and harmful. They stunt rehabilitation; compromise youth safety; risk, cause and compound both immediate and long-term physical, mental and emotional trauma; impede academic progress; increase recidivism; and affect future employment prospects.

We must explore non-carceral solutions especially for our children's sake. Making this a priority will ensure better outcomes not just for them but for our society collectively. This bill will ban the use of jail time for minor offenses, and allow our young people to return to their normal lives for personal growth and responsibility by accessing constructive, compassionate and restorative processes.

We support this bill because it places necessary limits between children and the law. And, we respectfully urge your vote in favor of it. We thank Senator Jill Carter for her leadership on this issue and the committee for its consideration.

Sincerely,

Huzzaifa Muhammad
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Council on American-Islamic Relations
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References:

1. Human Rights for Kids 2020 <https://humanrightsforkids.org/publication/2020-national-state-ratings-report/>. Accessed February 12, 2021.
2. OJJDP, Easy Access to Juvenile Populations, <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>.