



February 25, 2021

Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1187 – Juvenile Law- Juvenile Justice Reform

Dear Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1187 entitled Juvenile Law- Juvenile Justice Reform sponsored by Chair Clippinger. 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 This rating is a direct consequence of state lawmakers' failure to update antiquated laws. We strongly believe that protecting the rights and well-being of children in our state needs to be a priority.

The Juvenile Justice Reform Council in Maryland does critical work to investigate and expose how our criminal justice system is failing our youngest members of society. According to this 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. Communities of color are disproportionately harmed by this trend. 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

Our state's policies and laws regarding youth incarceration are unethical, costly, ineffective, and harmful. They stunt rehabilitation; compromise youths' 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 set a minimum age of 13 to be formally charged with a crime in the juvenile jurisdiction. It also aims to limit terms on probation so youth aren't held in the criminal justice system for extended periods of time, and are able to return to their normal lives for personal growth and responsibility.

This comprehensive legislation sets forth many measures that, once implemented, will reduce the population of juvenile offenders, and make it easier for troubled youth to access constructive, compassionate and restorative processes that will boost their own personal growth. We support this bill because it places necessary limits between children and the law. Therefore, we respectfully urge your vote in favor of it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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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/>.