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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1187
Juvenile Law – Juvenile Justice Reform**

TO: Hon. Chairman Clippinger and the members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Natalie Spicyn MD, MHS, FAAP

I am a primary care physician at a community health center in the Park Heights neighborhood of Baltimore, where, as a board-certified pediatrician and adult internal medicine specialist, I care for children, adolescents and adults across the life span. I am writing in strong support of HB 1187, which advances a suite of important juvenile justice reforms that will bring Maryland's practices in greater alignment with a developmentally appropriate response to juvenile infractions.

In brief, this bill would accomplish the following:

1. **Raise the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 13**, with exceptions for 10-12 year old children accused of committing the most serious crimes. This is in line with both international law, and our understanding of youth brain development. Maryland and Marylanders are not served by continuing to arrest these *pre-adolescent* children, whose cognitive processing would not equal nor surpass that of many adults who are deemed not fit to stand trial.
2. **Ban the use of juvenile jail and youth prisons for low level offenses**, such as a misdemeanor or technical violation of probation, with limited exceptions related to handgun offenses. Incarcerating children is extremely developmentally disruptive; it interrupts their education, limits the important social and emotional learning that occurs in the context of family and peer relationships, increases risk of psychological harm, decreases preparedness for healthy adulthood, and actually increases recidivism.
3. **Limit the terms of probation**, to bring it in line with key principles of adolescent development. As a pediatrician, I often counsel parents on how to approach disciplining their child; for toddlers, for example, we discuss that an 18-month old needs a briefer "time-out" for misbehavior than a 4 year old. Likewise with adolescents - young people need firm, fair and finite consequences for their actions, and limiting the terms of probation for low level offenses allows this insight to be operationalized within the juvenile justice system, so that we are utilizing these interventions to support young people in positive behavioral change and personal growth, away from law-breaking behaviors.
4. **Promote pre-court diversion out of the juvenile justice system.**

Unfortunately, in my medical practice, I see the toll that incarceration takes on the entire life trajectory of many individuals, and the ripple effects throughout their families and communities. I hope you will prioritize passage of HB 1187 during this legislative session and respectfully urge a favorable report.