



February 7, 2022

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building - Room 101
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – HB 294: Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support House Bill 294: Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (HB 294). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and unmet physical and mental health needs impact most of the children and adolescents who become involved with the justice system. In fact, multiple studies have found that over ninety percent of justice-involved youth have experienced at least one form of childhood trauma.¹ Ideally, contact with the justice system would serve as an opportunity to improve the health and developmental trajectory of youth by implementing services to address the young person's needs. Unfortunately, for many youth, involvement with the justice system, especially when automatically charged as an adult, serves as nothing more than another traumatic experience.

HB 294 attempts to strike a fairer framework for the justice-involved youth described above as it divests adult courts of initial jurisdiction over cases while simultaneously expanding the breadth of the juvenile court's jurisdiction. HB 294 wisely provides justice-involved youth with more room for rehabilitation and recognizes that while still young they have a lot of room and time to mature. MPS/WPS would note that studies have shown that recidivism rates are higher for juveniles with cases in adult criminal court compared with youth in the juvenile court system; this is particularly

¹ Baglivio M, Epps N, Swartz K, Huq M, Sheer A, Hardt N. The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) in the lives of juvenile offenders. *J Juv Justice*. 3(2): 1–23 (2014). See also, Bucci M, Marques S, Oh D, Harris N. Toxic stress in children and adolescents. *Adv Pediatr*. 63(1): 403–428 (2016).



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true for violent offenders.² MPS/WPS would also note that juvenile transfer laws have little or no effect on general juvenile crime rates despite being enacted for that very reason.³

Therefore, MPW/WPS asks for a favorable report on HB 294. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee

² Redding R. Juvenile Transfer Laws: An Effective Deterrent To Delinquency?. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; 2010. (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/220595.pdf>).

³ *Id.*