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Written Testimony

Senate Bill 691 - Juvenile Justice Reform

Judicial Proceedings Committee- March 3, 2022

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SUPPORT

Background: Senate Bill 691, (SB691), comes from recommendations from the Juvenile Justice Reform Council. If enacted, this bill would raise the minimum age that children can be arrested, establish age/developmentally appropriate limits to probation, allow for more restorative measures, and remove barriers to them, and stop the incarceration of children for low-level offenses.

Written Comments: Our community is concerned about failings in Maryland's juvenile justice system. The Baltimore Jewish Council and its faith partners believe it is critical to make reforms to that system. Our concerns are based on our values of child health, development, and education as well as for the well-being, safety and security of the communities. Maryland currently does not have an arrest age restriction and children as young as six have been arrested. SB691 will raise the minimum arrest age to 13. The state also does not have a restriction on juvenile probation length. This bill would generally limit the initial probation sentence to a maximum of one year, with some exceptions. It would also give more access to diversion programs like substance abuse and mental health treatment and jobs training for most first-time offenders, except in the case of violent crimes. Lastly, SB691 would prohibit the incarceration of children charged with a misdemeanor or technical violation of probation. Before Covid, 2/3 of incarcerated children were there for misdemeanors. When children commit crimes, great care should be taken to ensure that the justice system provides them with opportunity for rehabilitation and growth. Maryland's juvenile justice system is not meeting these goals today. These measures would help ensure that less children are incarcerated and create better outcomes for all children that touch the juvenile system.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of SB691.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

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