



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 24, 2022

**HB 877
Juveniles Charged as Adults - Confinement**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 877. The Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the three (arch)diocese serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 877 closes loopholes in ensuring that youth charged as adults are housed in juvenile facilities, not adult jails. This bill expands upon legislation this body passed seven years ago to ensure the same, but with certain exceptions.

Placing youth in adult jails, rather than the more nurturing, rehabilitative venue of juvenile detention facilities, poses several developmental issues. This is particularly true considering that some seventy percent of youth held in adult jails either have their cases dismissed entirely or remanded to the juvenile system. Additionally, only about twenty percent of youth charged as adults are actually convicted as adults resulting in permanent incarceration in the adult prison system.

Aside from the fact that youth placed in adult jails are more likely to be repeat offenders, they are subject to violence and possibly gang initiation. Youth placed in adult jails are 36 times more likely to commit suicide. Moreover, juveniles housed in adult jail populations spend an average of six months in the adult system, resulting in significant setbacks in their education and other services.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that “society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions. Placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution. In many instances, such terrible behavior points to our own negligence in raising children with a respect for life, providing a nurturing and loving environment, or addressing serious mental or emotional illnesses.” (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, USCCB, 2000)

House Bill 877 would shield vulnerable youth from exposure to violence and abuse and provide them access to the health benefits and educational opportunities afforded by the juvenile system. Therefore, we urge your support and favorable report of House Bill 877.