

Submitted by: Rev. Dr. Marlon B. Tilghman (a Harford County, MD Pastor, U.S. Marine Corps SSgt, retired commission '92), 1118 Marksworth Road, Gwynn Oak, Maryland 21207.

Senate Bill 691
Juvenile Law – Juvenile Justice Reform Support

Chair Will Smith and Honorable Senate Judiciary Proceeding Committee,

BRIDGE Maryland, Inc. is a non-profit faith-based organization that uses intentional relationship building, organizing and intensive leadership development to strengthen congregations and faith leaders to demonstrate and advance justice in the world. One of our primary functions is raising the consciousness of Maryland on the great work you all have done and as your partners will do in the future. That is why BRIDGE Maryland supports Senate Bill 691, which would align Maryland's laws that impact children and youth with established adolescent development science.

Senate Bill 691 provides us an opportunity not only to care for our most vulnerable population, but also to leverage system reductions related to COVID-19 with a youth justice system that benefits more young people, families, and communities. You cannot put a cost on the mental health of children in their development years, but what these reforms offer to children is community-based services that lead to better public safety outcomes at a fraction of the cost of adult system interventions. And if done intentionally, there is the opportunity to also reduce the pervasive racial disparities that persist in Maryland. There are statistically too many black and brown children per capita entering our judicial system that can be cured with legislation listed below. We want SB691 to pass because our membership of over 7 faith traditions feel it is our moral imperative to protect and reduce the risk of emotional, cultural, and situational trauma that could impact them into their adulthood. Child need #carenotcages. We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 691, the Juvenile Justice Reform Act.

SB691 targets four areas that move Maryland closer to our vision for youth justice:

1. **Raises the Minimum Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction:** If we want a truly rehabilitation juvenile justice system in Maryland – we must raise the minimum age of jurisdiction to 13.
2. **Place Developmentally Appropriate Time Limits on Probation:** When youth are placed on indefinite periods of probation, doing well on probation does not bring them closer to a light at the end of the tunnel, yet doing poorly can quickly land a youth in detention. Experts recommend that youth be placed on a period of six to nine months of probation, if they need to be placed on probation at all, and that “even for those who

struggle to meet their goals, the period of probation should generally not exceed one year.”¹

3. **Removes Barriers to Diversion:** There is a need to expand diversion and utilize it equitably by requiring informal adjustment of misdemeanors (excluding handgun possession) and non-violent felonies for all youth who have not previously been adjudicated delinquent.
4. **Bans Youth Incarceration for Low-Level Offenses:** Youth whose most serious alleged offense is a misdemeanor, or a technical violation of probation may not be placed in jails or prisons, which ends the harms of juvenile incarceration for low-level offenders and allows DJS to better leverage its resources to provide focused programming for those young people who face the most serious charges and are at the highest risk of re-offense.

Sincerely,

Marlon Tilghman

Rev. Dr. Marlon B. Tilghman,
Co-Chair of BRIDGE Maryland, Inc., Criminal Justice Workgroup

¹ Annie E. Casey, *Transforming Probation: A Vision for Getting it Right*, 2018.
www.aecf.org/resources/transforming-juvenile-probation/