



Testimony to the Judiciary Committee

2-1 HB 269 Juvenile Law - Child Interrogation Protection Act

Position- Support

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League supports social policies that secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all, and that promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans. We are concerned that Maryland children, *because of their age*, are more susceptible to police coercion than adults and more in need of legal counsel when interrogated by the police.

Under Maryland law, police can interrogate a child without a parent's presence or knowledge. While police forces in Maryland are required to inform minors of their rights and have them sign the standard Miranda form when they are interrogated or taken into custody, there is no assurance that all minors are equipped to understand those rights.

Research has shown that children are not capable of fully understanding the consequences of waiving their right to counsel and that minors are uniquely susceptible to coercive interrogation tactics employed by police.

In fact, a study of exonerations by the University of Michigan Law School found that "42 percent of exonerated juveniles had falsely confessed, compared with 13 percent of adults." Over the years, science, courts and doctors have researched and documented the inherent differences between children and adults in decision-making capacities, reflecting the rationale for separate justice systems for minors and adults.

HB 269 provides juveniles an unwaivable right to counsel before being interrogated by law enforcement, and would also require that law enforcement officers take all reasonable steps to notify the minor's parents or legal guardian before beginning questioning.

The LWVMD, representing 1500+ concerned citizens throughout Maryland, strongly urges a favorable report.