

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.

House Bill 459
Juvenile Law – Juvenile Justice Reform
Support

Chair Luke Clippinger and Honorable House Judiciary 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 House Bill 459, which would align Maryland's laws that impact children and youth with established adolescent development science.

We also want to thank this committee for passing this legislation out of this committee and the House in 2021. Therefore, my comments will be brief yet concise to those who may be new to the committee. House Bill HB459 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. The reforms in these will ensure that as many children as possible are treated with community-based services that lead to better public safety outcomes at a fraction of the cost of deep end interventions. If done intentionally, there is the opportunity to also reduce the pervasive racial disparities that persist in Maryland. We want SBHB459 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. We urge the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill HB459, the Juvenile Justice Reform Act.

HB459 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/