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Written Testimony

Housed Bill 294 - Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction

Judiciary Committee

February 10, 2022

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 294 (HB294) if enacted, would stop the automatic charging of youth in adult court. Currently in Maryland, children as young 14 can be automatically charged as adults for certain criminal charges. Maryland sends more youth to adult court than any other state besides Alabama. This bill does not preclude children to be tried as adults, it only precludes them from automatically beginning their legal process in adult court for certain criminal charges.

Written Comments: Last year Maryland sent more children to adult court than Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined. However, less than 13% of children charged as adults end up with a conviction. Starting these cases in juvenile court not only saves the state money and time, but it also creates better outcomes for these children. Children who start in the adult system are more likely to recidivate and engage in more violent crimes. Further, automatic charging shows large racial disparities, where over 80% of children charged as adults are Black and those children are much more likely to receive longer sentences in adult prison than White children.

The Baltimore Jewish Council believes that children are society's most vital futures resources, yet one of its most vulnerable classes. When they are charged with crimes, great care should be taken to ensure that the justice system provides them with fair opportunities for growth and that the mandatory charges of children as adults should be avoided.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report on HB294.

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.

