

Good afternoon delegates Crutchfield, Bartlett, Davis, Jones, Moon, Williams and members of the judiciary committee My name is Devonie Doles and I am the treasurer of the Maryland Green Party. I am also the older sister to a 15 year old boy named Jerome who is currently being held at Towson Detention Center under charges of first degree murder.

I support HB 294, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction. My brother has been held in Towson Detention center since early september and in that time he has been placed on suicide watch twice (including currently), kept in what is essentially solitary confinement for 3 months and has been jumped. Because of officers being understaffed at the detention center, they are not always able to keep the juveniles away from the adults. By trying to follow these rules Jerome was kept from showering for weeks at a time, was kept in a cell with no windows and little interaction with others and was unable to wash his clothes for weeks. If he was charged as a juvenile I firmly believe these things wouldn't have happened.

It is a travesty, knowing what we know about the brain and human development, to see our barbaric justice system as it is today treating children as adults. The science is clear: the human brain does not develop entirely until around 25 years of age. This is the same reason alcohol use is restricted to 21 and over in this country. If the human brain has not developed to make the decision to consume alcohol, how can we possibly expect children to both understand the seriousness of these crimes, and punish them for acting impulsively and in-the-moment, as children and adolescents do event day of their lives. Jerome has 10 more years of brain development to go. He can't buy alcohol, he can't sign a contract, he can't even buy a hotel room or rent a car. But yet he is considered old enough to be charged as an adult, old enough to be kept in an adult facility, and old enough to be kept in a cell by himself with no sunlight.

Further, we know that many times, such as in the case of Jerome Doles, that children charged with serious crimes are often the victims of abuse and neglect, be that verbal, physical or even sexual abuse. Jerome Doles lost 20 pounds over the last month he spent living with my father. He told his school the Friday before the incident that he was not in a safe space and that he was in danger of harming himself. I had to come over and take him to my house nearly every day over the summer to keep him away from my father and to make sure he was eating enough.

What kind of trauma does putting an adolescent, high-school aged child in solitary confinement for months on end inflict on a human being? I presume everyone on the Judiciary Committee is over 25; I assume that every single one would have significant mental trauma if they were subject to the same conditions as these children were. It's worse even for some of them. As some are being held in the same conditions as the adults, meaning forced solitary confinement.

When my father was held at Towson Detention Center in 2017 for three weeks, he saw a man hang himself. My father suffered from PTSD and seizures up to his death after being released. He came out of prison a different man. This was a 57 year old man mind you, and he suffered everyday for the rest of his life because of the prison system. 4 years later and his son has spent several times over as long in that same detention center. I am pleading with you to help break the cycle for my brother's sake, and for every juvenile who is currently being tried as an

adult to bring HB 294 to a floor vote. I hope it was as hard for you all to read this, as it was to type this.

Once again i urge you to get this bill out of committee and to a floor vote.

Regards,

Devonie Doles