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February 15, 2022

The Honorable Chairman Luke H. Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: HB 754 (Lopez) – Minors Convicted as Adults – Sentencing
Transfer to Juvenile Court**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, I write to express our support for HB 754, **Minors Convicted as Adults**. This bill takes into consideration the trauma and victimization that happens in a child's life prior to their system involvement.

The vast majority of children involved in the criminal justice system are contending with early childhood trauma and unmitigated Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including psychological, physical, and/or sexual abuse; witnessing domestic violence; living with family members who are substance abusers, suffer from mental illness or suicidal ideation, or are incarcerated. Studies have shown that approximately 90 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have experienced at least two ACEs, and 27 percent of boys and 45 percent of girls have experienced at least five ACEs.

Maryland sends more young people per capita to adult court based on offense type than any other state except for Alabama. That is why Maryland **ranks worst** in the country for protecting the rights of young people in the legal system. A major reason is that Maryland law requires some children to be automatically prosecuted in adult court for 33 offenses – putting us out of step with other states and international human rights law. Last year, Maryland sent more kids to adult court than California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined. A staggering 93% of those were youth of color.

Research shows that “tough on crime” policy shifts during the 1980s and 1990s have negatively impacted youth, families, and communities of color.



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These laws were fueled by high-profile criminal cases involving youth, sensationalized coverage of system-involved youth by the media, and crusading politicians who warned that juvenile “super-predators” posed a significant threat to public safety. The general sentiment – not based on research or data – across the political spectrum was that treatment approaches and rehabilitation attempts did not work.

The Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) helps currently and formerly incarcerated people to thrive by providing a supportive network, comprehensive reentry services, and opportunities to advocate for policy change. Our advocacy efforts work towards making our communities safe, healthy, and whole. Many of our Members vividly remember what it was like growing up during the mid-1990’s, an era that believed children could be as monstrous as a “superpredator” and undeserving of hope and redemption.

This dehumanizing message against children polarized communities and separated families from their children. The myth also normalized incarceration and extreme sentences for even the youngest among us. America no longer cared about raising children but instead only cared about how to punish them as harsh examples to deter crime.

However, time has shown that harshly punishing youth by trying them in the adult system has failed as an effective deterrent. Studies have found higher recidivism rates among juveniles tried and sentenced in adult court than among youth charged with similar offenses in juvenile court.

We respectfully urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 754.

Sincerely,

Michael Mendoza

Director Advocacy

Anti-Recidivism Coalition

mmendoza@antirecidivism.org