



"Being here for Maryland's Children, Youth, and Families"

Testimony submitted to House Judiciary Committee

February 10, 2021

**HB 294 - Juveniles Court - Jurisdiction
Support**

The Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus, which represents a network of Bureaus throughout the State of Maryland, Supports HB 294 Juveniles Courts - Jurisdiction. Youth Service Bureaus provide prevention, intervention and treatment services to youth and their families. HB 294 will alter the Juvenile Courts' jurisdiction over youth who have been charged with committing specific offenses. The Juvenile Court will have jurisdiction over youth 14 years old alleged to have done an act that, if committed by an adult, would be a crime punishable by life imprisonment and youth 16 years of aged alleged to have committed specific crimes. These youth would begin in the Juvenile Court System, which MAYSB believes is in line with the State's efforts to have a juvenile justice system that is developmentally informed and urges a favorable finding.

A developmentally informed approach to juvenile justice recognizes the need to hold youth accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources and opportunities to be rehabilitated. It recognizes that youth are still maturing and that their brains are not fully developed until after age 24. Youth who commit violent crimes should be held accountable for their actions and the harm they have done to others. They should not, however, be left without the possibility of rehabilitation. According to a 2016 report produced by Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services looking at six years of data, 60% of youth automatically sent to the adult justice system either had their case dismissed or sent back to the juvenile system. These youth were needlessly exposed to an adult criminal system and endured more court time as their cases were either dismissed or moved to the juvenile system. Allowing youth to be under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court system will decrease the exposure of youth to the adult system, a system whose mission is punishment rather than rehabilitation.

Maryland should be a leader in advocating that all children are capable of, and worthy of, redemption and deserve an opportunity for a second chance, regardless of their race, socio-economic background, or the crime of which they have been accused.

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A developmentally informed system is also fair and works to ensure that all youth receive fair and equal treatment. This bill will assist the State of Maryland in addressing racial and ethnic disparities (RED) found in the juvenile justice system. Data in Maryland shows that youth of color are disproportionately impacted at each decision point in the juvenile justice system. The Data Resource Guide 2020 for the Department of Juvenile Services indicates that of the total complaints received by DJS in 2021 (7129) 67% were youth of color. For Youth whose cases were formalized, (2941) 58% were youth of color. When one looks at youth transferred to the adult court (214 youth), 67% (143 youth) were youth of color. This bill will help increase the opportunity for fair treatment for youth of color as they move through the court system.

MAYSB believes that following a developmental informed approach to juvenile justice is important and allows youth the opportunity to be held accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources to develop and be rehabilitated. At its core this model recognizes that the thinking and maturity of juveniles is not equal to that of adults and works to offer them opportunities to change and learn from their mistakes.

We respectfully ask you to Support this bill.

Respectfully Submitted:

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