

TO : The House Judiciary Committee

FROM : Max Socol (mbsocol@gmail.com)

RE : HB 294 Juvenile Court Jurisdiction

Position : FAVORABLE

My name is Max Socol and I am a resident of Montgomery County, MD, in State District 18. For the past four years I have been a leader in the movement for racial justice in our community, as a co-founder of the Silver Spring Justice Coalition and the Montgomery County Racial Equity Network. I am also a former educator and spent the early years of my career working primarily with teenagers, who are the subject of this legislation.

I am glad that the legislature is considering an end to the practice of automatically charging children as adults, along with several other badly-needed reforms to our juvenile justice system. I strongly urge this committee to vote favorably on the bill with no amendments. I have also gathered written testimony from my neighbors which is included below.

The urge to punish has deep roots in our society. From the colonial plundering of the territory that became the United States and the need to apply a “lawful” characteristic to inherently lawless acts; to the slave patrols using brutal and often deadly violence to enforce an inhuman regime of exploitation; to the “wars” on ineffable social concepts like poverty, drugs, and terror, that were really wars against our own people. Punishment as a political tool is all too American.

Our children are not spared. Corporal punishment is still legal in many school districts. Suspensions, expulsions, and arrests by school-embedded police are consequences faced by poor and Black and brown children every day, across the country and in Maryland.

But in Maryland we bear some unfortunate distinctions. We charge more children as adults than nearly any other state in the country. Last year, Maryland sent more kids to adult court than California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined. 81% of these children are Black.

If the committee finds it relevant, I will add here that this regime of punishment does not achieve its goal, if the goal is to improve public safety. The vast majority of these cases do not result in an adult conviction, instead merely consuming time and the scarce resources of public defenders, while traumatizing children in the process. Children who are transferred to adult court are more likely to experience or commit violence and more likely to be arrested again in the future than counterparts who remain in the juvenile system.

But to me, as an educator, all of that is beside the point. Children are children. No matter what horrible circumstance or mistake in their lives might have led them to court, they deserve to be

treated as they are, and not to face additional, unnecessary, counterproductive punishment. They did not choose to grow up in a society obsessed with punishment.

Again, I hope the committee will move this bill forward without amendments that would weaken it, or carve out exceptions, or anything else that suggests that punishment remains our goal. It should not be too much to ask that Maryland join the majority of states in having a legal system that treats children as children. And we cannot begin to unwind centuries of punishment-as-policy if we do not have the courage first and foremost to spare our children. Thank you for your consideration.

Testimony from Maryland residents

Name (First Last or Official Name)	City	Zip/Postal	Notes
Matthew Butler	Columbia	21044	Because the justice system is unequally applied, we need to allow every child the rights that are afforded to them in the constitution. Any time we back children into a place where they feel forced to interact in a certain way without an adult looking toward their interest, we create a system that is morally objectionable.
Stephen Melkisetian	Bethesda	20814	I believe that cases involving juveniles should start in juvenile court. I also think we need to take a serious look at why so many of the kids who are sent to adult court are black.
Alan Socol	Kensington	20895	This procedure will save resources and probably keep some juveniles from the express lane to criminality. It's a better option for everyone.
Peter Myo Khin	Silver Spring	20904	Do not throttle back any of the police reforms bills up for consideration in the General Session. These reforms are in dire need and would not have been put forth if not needed. please support the three juvenile bills up for consideration this session.
Beth Socol	Kensington	20895	Not done fairly for people of color
Catherine Stauss	Takoma Park	20912	Young people should get to see a judge who can decide what's best rather than some automatic trigger. That's old 1990s views of crime, that failed. Maryland needs to turn around.
Emily Zeller	Rockville	20852	Recidivism, racism, and lack of resources all go hand in hand. Children should not be charged in adult courts, and Maryland needs to catch up.

Michael Tardif	Kensington	20895	The statistics are appalling: last year, Maryland sent more kids to adult court than California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined. A staggering 81% of those children were Black. Maryland must be first, not last, in juvenile justice reform.
Elaine Weiss	Silver Spring	20902	These policies would be a travesty of justice in any state, but to have them in place in Maryland, where we pride ourselves on functional policy-making and a progressive legislature is baffling and absolutely unacceptable. We can do better, and we need to!
Alexander Banks	Silver Spring	20902	It's repugnant that we treat our most vulnerable people with such a lack of humanity. That there are even children being treated like adults (adults who are already being inhumanely disregarded in our criminal justice system) within our broken, racist, and classist courtrooms is unacceptable.
Collin Foster	Piney Point	20674	Either children are children, or they're not. There shouldn't be a double standard in the criminal justice system for juvenile cases.
John Wilson	Silver Spring	20901	Automatic charging sounds like a "tough on crime" stance that doesn't respect the individual circumstances of children. Can't we be smarter?
Joseph Puglisi	Kensington	20895	Youth deserve a second chance! They should not be locked up except for in the gravest circumstances!
Laurel Hoa	Potomac	20854	Brain development is different in children and youth than in adults. They should not be automatically prosecuted as adults.
Danielle Veith	Kensington	20895	As a mother of two white kids, I'm sickened to learn about how badly we treat Black and brown kids in the so-called Justice system in Maryland. All of our children deserve to be treated as children. I support efforts to ensure they are.
Molly Hauck	Kensington	20895	Youth should be given help from a lawyer and given a second chance.
Sandra Marquardt	Silver Spring	20902	Kids may be messed up and do atrocious things, but they are still kids and that should be taken into consideration.

Emily Beckman	Kensington	20895	Adult court is not appropriate for children, and children should not start out their cases in adult court when no one in the system has even evaluated the strength of the evidence or the culpability of the child. Children should 100% be presumed to be children, and be held in facilities that are appropriate to children, that understand their developmental stage and that can provide appropriate services such as school. Adult jails are unquestionably inappropriate environments for children and should certainly not be the initial placement of a child who has just been accused of a crime.
Julie Berla	Columbia	21044	I have been a school counselor in Maryland for 28 years. Kids need support and compassion not jail time. We can do better. The disproportionality is horrendous. Our black youth need us. BLACK LIVES MATTER!
Robert Stubblefield	Silver Spring	20904	Because youth should not be punished as adults for petty crimes and if white youth are given a plethora of chances, than so should black youth and non black youth of color
Sallie Holmes	Silver Spring	20901	It is outrageous that so-called progressive Maryland ranks worst in the country for protecting the rights of young people in the legal system. Every day in Maryland, children entangled in the legal justice system are questioned without a parent, guardian, or attorney present. As a result, they face criminal charges, prosecution, and incarceration without the basic due process rights that adults are entitled to. This is particularly dire for Black, Indigenous, and Children of Color, who are overpoliced. Maryland and Maryland's children deserve better. I call upon you to stop automatically charging youth in adult court and do everything you can to pass SB 165/HB 294.
MARY LOU HARTMAN	Chevy Chase	20815	Everyone deserves second chances, especially children. Children must be treated like children.
Lizz Goldstein	Vienna	22182	I live right over the line in VA and have been involved in faith-based initiatives here as well to change how harshly many people are charged. We should all be pursuing more rehabilitative action, especially for youth.