



## Board of Directors

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February 08, 2022

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

**Re: HB 294 (Crutchfield) – Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction  
Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, I write to express our support for HB 269, **Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults**. This bill recognizes that children are developmentally different from adults and should not be treated like adults in the criminal justice system.

**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.

In Maryland, youth as young as 14 can be tried in adult court depending on what charge a police officer decides to levy against them. When young people are automatically charged in adult court, they are more likely to re-offend, sooner, with more violent crime than children who are charged in juvenile court. This practice undermines the purpose of the juvenile court system, pursues punishment rather than rehabilitation, and conflicts with what we know from developmental science. Furthermore, laws that allow youth to be tried in adult court reflect and reinforce the racial inequities that characterize the justice system in the United States.

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 can and must treat our children better. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have passed laws to treat kids like kids and end automatic charging. We respectfully urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 294.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Mendoza".

Michael Mendoza

Director Advocacy

Anti-Recidivism Coalition

[mmendoza@antirecidivism.org](mailto:mmendoza@antirecidivism.org)