



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 294: Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate, Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

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The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland asks for a favorable vote on HB 294. HB 294 replaces how juveniles pass through the court and sentencing system with a process that many other states have found to be more effective and safer for the juvenile and the general public.

Maryland has the distinction of placing more of its juveniles directly into the adult court system than most other states. Court data shows that 81% of children sent to adult prison are Black. These black youth are more likely to be sent to adult prison and receive longer sentences than white youth. This pattern needs to end!

Evidence-Based studies have shown that placing juveniles in confinement with adults has a very negative impact on their development. At their age, the juveniles are trying to form their identities and “fit in” with others. *Unfortunately, there aren't enough positive role models in prison.* In fact, some seasoned prisoners have a powerful negative influence on the younger generation who look up to and want to identify with them.

Research shows that juveniles who are placed with adults tend to become more violent and have a higher recidivism rate than juveniles who begin their treatment through the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. This process makes our communities safer. Based on recent research findings, many other states now consider the juvenile's treatment in conjunction with their developmental ages. Juvenile courts can provide intervention programs and alternative placements like community-based residential housing, or treatment centers with counseling and other needed services through the juvenile court system.

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The Juvenile Courts are better equipped to accurately determine what treatments can be used to fit their needs. Which means that juveniles who begin their encounter with the correctional system will be better served and less likely to recidivate. HB 294 is a more humane approach to this issue which aligns with our first principle, to “Honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people.” Our juveniles deserve compassion for the causes which have led to their trouble, and equity and justice in the treatment provided to help with their recovery.

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland asks for a favorable vote on HB 294.

Respectfully submitted,

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