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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Judiciary Committee  
For the Hearing on  
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (HB 294)  
February 10, 2022**

**SUPPORT**

Free State PTA represents over 34,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

This bill expands the jurisdiction of the juvenile court to cover:

1. Children aged 14 and older who are alleged to have done an act which, if committed by an adult, would be a crime punishable by life imprisonment;
2. Children aged 16 and older who are alleged to have committed certain crimes; and
3. Children who have previously been convicted as an adult of a felony and are subsequently alleged to have committed an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult.

State juvenile courts with delinquency jurisdiction handle cases in which juveniles are accused of acts that would be crimes if adults committed them. Free State PTA firmly believes that any effort to improve the safety of our nation's youth and our communities must be comprehensive and this includes the appropriate court system in which juvenile cases be heard. There are multiple advantages to expanding the jurisdiction of a juvenile court. Trying juveniles in a juvenile court jurisdiction has a greater likelihood of providing juveniles with needed services. Free State PTA supports robust education programs to teach students, parents, and community members about and violence prevention.

Transferring juveniles into adult court minimizes parent involvement. If one is an adult, they are treated as such, and parents have limited rights to advocate for their child. Additionally, more youth of color go into the adult system in the United States than other groups. Hence, there is a concern of equity of over penalizing youth of color within the juvenile justice system. Free State PTA encourages the Maryland court system to implement policies and practices that are reflective of this understanding and its relationship to institutional racism and how it affects the well-being of children of color.

Lastly, HB 294 strikes a balance of repealing certain reportable offenses to the local superintendent and school principal which promotes youth and community safety. Free State PTA recommends a favorable report on HB 294.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

*Marla Posey-Moss*  
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The mission of PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by  
engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.