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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB269
Juvenile Law - Child Interrogation Protection Act

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and member of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern. I live in Chevy Chase, in state district 16 and I am a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation. I am providing testimony in favor of SB0053, Juvenile Law - Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act. I provide this testimony as a mother and grandmother.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that juveniles must have a right to counsel is the directive issued in Deuteronomy 16:20, **“Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue.”** The Jewish sages explain that the word tzedek is repeated not only for emphasis but to teach us that in our pursuit of justice, our means must be as just as our ends. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan wrote **“teach us to respect the integrity of every human soul be it that of a friend or stranger, child or adult.”** When we are working to reform our criminal justice system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

As a mother of two children and a grandmother of three, I cannot imagine allowing my children or grandchildren to be interrogated by police without prior legal consultation and parental/guardian notification. **This lack of justice should no longer be allowed in our state.** A minor may not understand their rights, or the warnings given to them. Many may not have the education, experience, background, and capacity to even know that they can stay silent, ask for an attorney or call their parents.

All youth in Maryland must be guaranteed access to legal representation before they are questioned by police. No child should be interrogated by law enforcement without being able to consult a lawyer. But Maryland does not mandate that young people have access to legal counsel before being interrogated by police. This contributes to the criminalization and incarceration of black and brown youth who are disproportionately targeted by our justice system. SB0053 adds much needed reforms for treating minors in the justice system with equality and the respect that all people deserve.

I respectfully urge the committee to return a favorable report on HB269