



Senate Bill 93
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)
Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults
February 16, 2023
Support

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition is proud to present the public comments of **more than 100** Maryland residents who strongly support the Youth Equity & Safety Act. From Montgomery County and Baltimore City to Talbot County, the people of Maryland want to end the automatic charging of youth as adults. This document contains comments from adults who spent time in the juvenile system, relatives who've seen their family members automatically charged as adults, teachers, lawyers, and parents – Marylanders who all agree that every juvenile charge should start in juvenile court. The General Assembly must pass SB 93 and ensure that Maryland has a fair and efficient justice system.

Public Comments:

No child or young teen should be treated like an adult without a comprehensive evaluation evaluated by a judge. A prosecutor is striving for conviction, full-stop & will pursue that goal cause that's how they are evaluated. Do not end the life potential of a young person as a matter of inhumane procedure.

Claire Landers, Baltimore County

Children are kids—they do not have the developmental capacity to fully grasp the repercussions of their actions or the degree of emotional regulation that adults have. So they should not be prosecuted in adult courts! The focus with kids should be on supporting and rehabilitating them.

Ronna Popkin, Montgomery County

Judges are more qualified than police to make these decisions. It disproportionately impacts youth of color.

Naomi Adams, Baltimore City

Children need support not punishment. These are children.

Perri Dejarnette, Carroll County

Keeping kids in jail is easy, but it is not the right thing. Young people's brains tend to react differently under stress. What needs to happen is create more mentoring programs to give them opportunities.

Niesha McCoy, Baltimore County

I support this act because children should not be tried in adult court. The percentage of Black children tried in adult courts is shocking and a clear example of institutional racism at work.

Christina Juhasz-Wood, Baltimore City

This bill will keep our communities safer. Studies and experts agree, youth charged in adult court are almost 34% more likely to be rearrested and with more serious offenses as compared to youth who have their cases heard in juvenile court for the same charges. This bill will result in better outcomes over time for young people by starting their cases in the juvenile system, which has smaller caseloads, greater access to rehabilitation, and closer collaboration with families and schools. This bill gives prosecutors and judges MORE discretion. But more personally, as a defense attorney I have been forced to sit next to young Black men from Baltimore when they are facing adult prison sentences in court. Every time I have had to argue for the humanity of the child sitting beside me, it has broken a piece of my soul. This practice is a barbaric, racist relic of Maryland's segregationist and white supremacist past. I want a better future for my kids – and for all the kids I love in this city.

Jenny Egan, Baltimore City

I am convinced that auto charging is not a deterrent and does not make us safer. The racial and ethnic disparities in this practice place Maryland violate basic human rights and dignity.

Kelly Quinn, Baltimore City

There is a better chance to teach young people an alternative way of life, away from crime. We want to keep them from committing crimes later.

Malka Kutnick, Montgomery County

I support the YES Act because children who are sentenced as adults don't receive the correct resources for reform and support. The YES Act does not prevent judges from individually deciding to send a child's case to adult court. What it does do is prevent that from being automatic for certain crimes. In this way, we can help the children in our community get back on track in an environment suited for their age. Please pass the YES Act and support our community's future.

Allison Evans, Prince George's

Our default position should never be that a 14-year-old kid begins the criminal justice process in adult court. We must end this overly aggressive and racially unjust practice and leave such decisions to prosecutors and judges.

Carl Graziano, Howard County

We must stop this harmful practice that causes too many children to be locked up in adult jails and facilities where they are subject to physical abuse and don't get the education and other services they need. We must treat children like children and end this unjust practice.

Melissa Goemann, Montgomery County

Charging children as adults is extremely detrimental and increases recidivism. Having more mechanisms to keep young people in a youth-appropriate setting increases chances of rehabilitation.

Alejandra, Montgomery County

Kids should be treated like kids.

Christina Gilbert, Montgomery County

Although many of these children are reassigned to juvenile court, they are now stuck in adult jail for months or more awaiting that decision. Even if released, they are not afforded the services needed to overcome the conditions which contributed to their offending in the first place (if, indeed, they are guilty!) Punishment should not precede adjudication!

Betsy Amey, Baltimore County

I support the YES Act because it protects children from inappropriate placement in the adult criminal system while alleviating an unnecessary and expensive burden on the courts. Young people in our state deserve a more personal look at the reasons behind their actions and more help changing their path in life.

Sandra Graziano, Howard County

Minors should not be treated like adults in our criminal system as they are not equipped physically or mentally to be so.

Erica Rapach, Montgomery County

Because the resources are there for kids to be tried as kids.

Andy Krew, Baltimore City

Every case is NOT the same! Stop automatically charging children as adults, especially in cases where it's clearly not warranted. This bill will protect against causing more damage to an already traumatized child in need of appropriate interventions.

T. Braveheart, Baltimore City

The children should be younger and have more lenient sentences.

William Wingo, Baltimore City

I support the YES Act because the brains of children under 18 are not fully formed. They are incapable of exercising the same judgment as adults and therefore should never be held to the same standards. This is why we don't entrust students to vote, to drink, to enter the military, or to drive until they have reached a certain level of maturity. In addition, children are likely to be preyed upon by adult inmates when they enter prison. Finally, sentencing a child to jail is likely sentencing them to a lifetime of engagement with the prison system rather than offering a child a chance at rehabilitation and an opportunity for the life we all hope to have.

Brian Slocum, Montgomery County

Because it is not their fault to be born into a lousy system.

Minda Baumstein, Baltimore City

Young people in Maryland deserve every chance to succeed in life, and I believe the YES Act will result in better outcomes for young people in the criminal justice system.

Mari Schimmer, Montgomery County

As a retired historian, I know that the US has never granted Black children the same protections as white children. The failure to respect or even to recognize black childhood has its roots in slavery, with its brutal labor regime and its disregard for the integrity of black families. Today, the criminal justice system perpetuates this disregard—nowhere more so than when it treats Black children as if they were adults when appearing in court. The YES act rejects our history of disparate treatment and respects the developmental needs of all of Maryland's children.

Toby Ditz, Baltimore City

Our teens should not be subjected to these laws at such a young age. And facing adult charges at this stage of their lives, can condemn them to significant difficulties the rest of their lives. Change these laws.

Steven Brigham, Prince George's County

Children should be treated as children by default, not adults! Even children accused of crimes should have their dignity and youth respected.

Vanessa Prell, Montgomery County

Children need to be treated as children. If a judge decides, they can be treated as adults, but the default should always be to be treated in a juvenile court.

Heidi Rhodes, Montgomery County

Kids need to be treated in an age appropriate manner and should be kept in the juvenile system.

Fran Zamore, Montgomery County

Children should be treated as children and should be adjudicated in juvenile court not in adult court. Automatically moving kids to adult court and therefore to adult prison is racist and harmful to children. It is more fair to the child to let a juvenile court judge decide if a kid should remain in the juvenile justice system based upon the circumstances of the crime, the child's circumstances, etc.

Jo Shifrin, Montgomery County

Research shows that the adolescent brain is not yet fully developed. Adolescents should be part of the adult criminal justice system.

Jeff Reiser, Montgomery County

Children and youth need to be treated differently than adults. The present system seems unenlightened about children's issues in today's society. Passing this law has the potential to keep young people from being rearrested.

Barbara Schaffer, Montgomery County

This bill is very simple: it will improve racial equity in Maryland. Today is always the best time to act.

Nathan Feldman, Montgomery County

Maryland sends more young people to adult court based on offense type, per capita, than any other state except for Alabama. We should be better; we should do better. The YES Act will keep our communities safer. Studies and experts agree, youth charged in adult court are almost 34% more likely to be rearrested and with more serious offenses as compared to youth who have their cases heard in juvenile court for the same charges. This bill will result in better outcomes over time for young people by starting their cases in the juvenile system, which has smaller caseloads, greater access to rehabilitation, and closer collaboration with families and schools. We can and must treat our youth better. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have ended the automatic charging of youth as adults – we must pass the Youth Equity and Safety Act.

Nicole Kaplan, Montgomery County

Too many people end up in prison when they need mental health support. Stepping in at an early age can lead to better outcomes and help keep teens from cycling in and out of prison.

Melissa Plotkin, Montgomery County

I'm a dad to two young kids. I don't want them to grow up thinking that legislators are more concerned with punishment than helping our young folks learn and be an example of investing in our communities.

Pulin Modi, Montgomery County

Two reasons. One, the statistics show an alarming racial bias in the effect the current law has. Two, logically, the point of having juvenile courts is that we as a society agree that minor children and youth do not have the responsibility that an adult has. The quantity and severity of a child's actions have no bearing on whether the child has the capacity and responsibility of an adult. A child is a child.

Evan Brettell, Prince George's County

I support the YES Act because I have learned that: "Studies and experts agree, youth charged in adult court are almost 34% more likely to be rearrested and with more serious offenses as compared to youth who have their cases heard in juvenile court for the same charges." Because prosecutors will still be able to prosecute offenders in adult court, when appropriate, there is no reason for Maryland to continue this judicial form of systemic racism. If California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined send fewer juveniles to adult courts, that is an enormous red flag that Maryland is out of step with common sense, fairness, and justice.

Linda Murphy, Prince George's County

It is the right thing to do.

Barbara Gifford, Montgomery County

Young people's ideas of law and justice are not fully formed until they are adults. Juvenile courts were designed to deal with youth. We should be embarrassed about how we treat youth offenders. We should keep them in juvenile court and juvenile incarceration

Witold Skwierczynski, Baltimore County

Kids aren't adults and shouldn't be in adult court. We shouldn't be sending kids straight from school to prison. Their brains aren't even fully developed.

Stephanie, Washington County

Efficiency matters! Black lives matter! Children are children and should not be automatically charged as adults.

Leanora Winters, Calvert County

MD needs to hold children accountable, but also remember each child's age makes a big difference. Scientifically, a child's brain by 14 just isn't fully developed. So, charging them as Adults would mean they'd be incarcerated with other Adults. This would be such a disservice to any child.

Deborah Charles, Prince George's County

Kids are kids. They are not fully developed mentally, which is the basis for many of the irrational decisions they make no matter how egregious. Many children are raising themselves or are being raised by individuals who are not the best role models.

Shavon Myles, Prince George's County

We are locking away our future – destroying too many futures.

Dave Dittman, Howard County

We need to stop treating our juveniles as adults in Maryland. The YES Act would move the state in the right direction.

Marlee Miller, Washington County

I support the YES Act because children are not adults! They deserve a system that honors their developing minds and offers them appropriate consequences.

Judy Powers, Baltimore City

We can do better as a State. We need to provide for these kids on the street – safety, education, training, opportunities = INVEST! For everyone's sake.

Julia Hart, Talbot County

From the statistic of 81% of the youth charged are black it is clear that the law is not applied fairly.

Jane Arason, Anne Arundel County

Children do not have the ability to reason like adults. We need to recognize that children are children and give them appropriate treatment, not lengthy incarceration aimed at hardened criminals.

Judith Gelman, Montgomery County

Our prefrontal cortex isn't fully developed until we are in our mid-20s. That's the part of the brain responsible for logical reasoning and decision-making. Yet Maryland treats children as adults when it comes to criminal law. If a person is not mature enough to vote, or buy cigarettes, or enlist in the military, they surely aren't mature enough to be treated as an adult in our criminal justice system.

Danielle Rowland Lindahl, Anne Arundel County

Juveniles deserve even more careful judicial decisions than do adults. Their whole adult lives shouldn't be clouded with disadvantage because of youthful mistakes of judgment.

Lucy Duff, Prince George's County

The YES Act just makes logical sense. 85% of cases involving minors that begin in the adult system end up either being returned to juvenile court or dismissed. Our courts are repeatedly deciding that these cases do not belong in adult court, so why should the law assume that's the venue in which they will be tried? Brain science, and our own experience once being children and knowing children, proves that youth have immense capacity for change. Kids belong in a legal system that is designed to meet their needs. The adult criminal legal system cannot do anything positive for kids. Let these cases start in juvenile court, where they belong, and let a judge decide if they should be moved into adult court.

Rachel Gassert, Anne Arundel County

My son will be 14 years old in a few weeks and it's terrifying to imagine that the goofy boy who often forgets to put socks on in the morning could be considered an adult if he commits one of the selected crimes. Children should start out in juvenile court by default, no matter what their crime.

Mara Greengrass, Montgomery County

This bill does not stop children from being prosecuted in adult court. It only requires that all children have their cases start in juvenile court. The need is supported by the fact the judges send 87% of cases in Maryland from adult court to juvenile court or dismiss them.

Ran Zeimer, Baltimore City

Children should not be held to the same standards of criminal liability as adults because they are literally unable to control their behavior as adults can; they are simply not as culpable for what they do. Moreover, children who commit crimes have tremendous capacity to change and grow and rehabilitate, which is hindered not helped by placing them in the adult criminal legal system. We treat children as children in every other area of the law, there is no reason to make an exception here.

Joanna Silver, Montgomery County

Kids should be tried as kids - even if they have committed a violent crime, they are still kids. Putting them with adults only increases their chances of recidivism. We don't send kids to graduate school with adults because they are not prepared. Why on earth would we send them to jail with adult criminals?

Dana Lande, Montgomery County

I have been an educator for over 50 years, committed to effective and equitable practices. I've also worked globally with youth, from Burmese Refugee Camps to not my sixth term at a post-genocide high school for vulnerable youth in Rwanda. Children are just that...still growing, going and learning about life in often traumatic and dramatic ways. They are, for the most part, evidence of their stories. They need support and legal management based on who they currently are - under-aged youngsters.

Phyllis Lerner, Montgomery County

Maryland needs to stop wasting taxpayer dollars and the court's time by starting cases in adult court. 87% of them are sent back to juvenile court or dismissed.

It's unjust to criminalize youth and prosecute them as adults. While their brains are still developing, they deserve the opportunity to learn from mistakes.

Robin Yasinow, Montgomery County

Our systems have let down Black children. We need to do more to support them before they get into trouble. That's where our focus should be, not on trying them as adults.

Audrey Rothstein, Montgomery County

Kids sent automatically to adult court might be on their way to becoming "thrown away kids". Statistics show much higher recidivism rates for them, rather than successful rehabilitation. The YES Act will allow judges more discretion to send kids to juvenile court, and keep them out of the adult system. It will untie the hands of the court.

Mary Kirschman, Baltimore City

Kids should be treated as kids. If they do something wrong, hold them accountable. But do it in a way that teaches them the right way to behave. Don't put them in an adult prison where they will learn more criminal behavior and will be likely to commit crimes again. Let the judge use his/her discretion.

Jethro Lieberman, Montgomery County

Children don't belong in adult court. They may lack the cognitive ability to understand their rights.

Claire Freeland, Baltimore County

It will save money, reduce strain on our court system, and produce better outcomes.

Marc Friedman, Montgomery County

This measure is the minimum we should be doing. Kids are kids. Ideally, they shouldn't be able to be charged as adults. Failing that, the least we can do is ensure that at least, there is leeway to allow charging children as children.

Gidon van Emden, Montgomery County

I don't understand why children over 14 are automatically charged as adults, unless the reason is that the justice system thinks Black youth (80% of those charged) are automatically mature. Also, outcomes for society (not to mention the youth in question) are generally better for youth charged in the juvenile justice system. There is nothing in the YES Act to prevent children being charged as adults in extraordinary circumstances. So yes, please pass the YES Act.

Emily Blank, Prince George's County

I support the YES Act because it is an important step towards using evidence based practices in response to harmful behavior. The data has shown our current response to youth crime actually contributes to youth reoffending when older. It is past time to end the punitive response to harm that continues to perpetuate mass incarceration.

Braden Stinar, Baltimore City

Say YES to common sense. Imprisoning children as if they were adults goes against what we know about brain development and is far more likely to turn them into adult criminals than any of the child justice alternatives.

Stu Simon, Montgomery County

I have been inside MD prisons as a volunteer for the Alternatives to Violence Project for over 20 years, and I have met young men who have been imprisoned since they were teens. Some have genuinely worked at changing their attitude and behavior. People, especially young people, have the ability to change.

Nancy Hutchins, Frederick County

Because kids are kids and should be dealt with as such.

Deborah Amster, Montgomery County

Children should not be treated or prosecuted as adults. The Courts of our country and state have accepted that children and juveniles are less culpable and more capable of change. They do not belong in the adult criminal system.

Sarah Gottlieb, Baltimore City

It would protect young people from the recidivism likely in charging them as adults; it would address racial and class disparities in prosecution.

Claudia Leight, Baltimore City

Children need support to stay in school and receive mental health care, social services, and rehabilitation. They will not get these as quickly if they are automatically charged as adults, especially children of color. Maryland has excessive rates of incarceration--we need to interrupt this system as early as we can in favor of restorative justice, especially for our youth.

Deedee Jacobsohn, Montgomery County

Juveniles should be held accountable for crimes they commit but should be given counseling, care, and support. Do not lock them up and discard them.

Janeane Marks, Montgomery County

Kids still have developing brains. We want them to learn and grow up to be responsible citizens, not be treated as if they're mini adults.

Jessica Escobedo, Montgomery County

There's a reason we treat kids differently than adults -- even when they make terrible terrible mistakes. We have to treat kids as we'd want our own kids to be treated.

Jonathan Rochkind, Baltimore City

The number of people of color that are incarcerated is incredibly disproportionate, and it often starts with treating juveniles as adults. We need to do better for our Black youth.

Mike Morucci, Howard County

As a teacher, I see that kids who act tough are still children inside. Trying children as adults penalizes children whose brains are not yet fully developed and who don't think through the consequences of their actions. And Black children are WAY more likely to be "adultified" than white children. Keep children who commit crimes in juvenile court for age appropriate sentencing.

Lisa Hack, Montgomery County

Because black youth matter. Automatic charging disproportionately affects Black youth and racial justice is always worth fighting for. Kids shouldn't have their entire lives destroyed because of one misstep. We all need Grace but especially youth.

Hannah Freeman, Baltimore City

My nephew has suffered from his practice of charging children as adults. He lived in New York State at the time, but Maryland has one of the worst records of children-prosecuted-as-adults. My nephew has spent decades overcoming early incarceration as a young teen. Stop this devastating practice and give young Marylanders a chance to mature into contributing adults--lifting up our communities.

Susan Allen, Anne Arundel County

Teens and 18 should not be treated as adults in the Maryland Justice System. Their development is still in process and their discernment and independent responsible decision making is not yet mature. That is why we have a separate juvenile justice system. Rehabilitation must be objective in the Juvenile Justice system, a goal that should not be undermined by subjecting underage violators to the adult criminal justice system.

Jordan Harburger, Anne Arundel County

Children are growing up these days surrounded by violent crime in their communities, on TV, in the movies. Many of them are not being raised to understand that this way of life is not acceptable. Children who commit crimes that currently would put them in adult court, need to be placed in a proper setting where they can be evaluated and taught a new way of life. That place is not an adult prison.

Ruthanne Kaufman, Baltimore County

Youth under the age of 18 are not adults. They are children and their minds are not yet fully developed. They should have the opportunity for rehabilitation, as the juvenile justice system would provide. Many youths charged with murder haven't killed anyone. They happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Again, they are not adults; they are still children. Most cannot vote, cannot run for public office, cannot drink, cannot sign contracts. So, what makes you think that they should be charged as adults? They certainly don't look like adults. They are children and don't belong in adult prisons. They don't deserve to die in prison.

Linda Indyke, Baltimore County

Children are at the beginning of their lives. We hold them accountable but must use education, counseling and other services to give them another chance. We show great support to our own children. Let us show, at least, basic support to all the children in our community.

Phil Miller, Baltimore County

As a parent, I am very aware that children are very different from adults and deserve to be treated as children. Putting a child who is struggling in with adults who have committed crimes will NOT enhance that child's chances of moving in a positive direction.

Camilla Day, Montgomery County

Let's find ways to deal with children in developmentally appropriate and effective ways.

Marla Zipin, Montgomery County

Automatic charging of youth in adult court is wrong - the juvenile courts are designed to support consideration of children and determine whether transfer to adult court is warranted. This cruel approach directly harms people of color and was perhaps designed with that in mind to begin with. Let's end this practice.

Charles Koplik, Anne Arundel County

The YES Act (SB93/HB96) gives the courts some flexibility in being able to act up on and to manage jurisprudence over the youth here in Maryland. Every child and maturing youth makes mistakes based upon a brain that is not completely matured to think in a more complex far reaching manner. Those children who have done wrong based on impulsivity should be punished for the wrong action but also be corrected and further taught and trained to control their impulsivity and to make better decisions considering more on the long term consequences of their actions. It is not easy. Not for those youths who do not make criminal mistakes AND not for the youths that DO perform criminal actions. They truly need to be treated differently than adults who have a more mature capacity to determine their actions. Let's treat kids as kids. Medicine and mental health practitioners can confirm that kids are not just small adults. They are vastly different that function differently and act differently. Let's just incorporate those proven facts into our justice system. Thank you.

Mark Sugarman, Baltimore County

Trying children as adults has not been an effective way to prevent criminal behavior. Furthermore, teenagers are not mature enough to be tried and imprisoned as adults. While punishments may be necessary, we want to be thinking about the potential for youthful offenders to re-enter society and not offend again.

Susan Tafler, Anne Arundel County

Young people should be able to have their cases heard in juvenile courts, rather than adult courts. This would be both a) in the interest of fairness to young people and b) in the interest of the broader community's wellbeing. The information we have suggests that charging youths in adult courts tends to increase their chances of recidivism. This is based on comparison to youths who had their cases—for the same charges—go through juvenile courts. Youths should be treated as youths, not as full-grown adults.

Grace Ferguson, Howard County

Putting children in adult jails puts them at undue risk of being harmed and abused. This harm and abuse constitutes unreasonable punishment. By putting children in adult jails, we are stripping them of their constitutional rights. Children deserve respect and protection, including when they are arrested.

Rachel Hale, Montgomery County

I am a survivor of the pipeline to prison.

KeSean Johnson, Baltimore City

There's a reason the law treats youth offenders differently from adults. We recognize they are neither physically, mentally, or legally ready to behave or be held to the same standards. Those concerns are even greater the more serious the crime because even graver consequences are at play. At a minimum, juvenile cases should start in the juvenile system so that an appropriate analysis can occur before a case is sent to the adult courts. All of this is exponentially more important when we have data showing the discriminatory outcomes of the system.

Avi Meyerstein, Montgomery County

The more we learn about human brain development and the effects of trauma, the clearer it becomes that we need to stop punishing our young people. Children and young adults need help to change their behavior. Incarceration and other punishments designed for adults don't work on children. They don't work on adults, either, but brains that are still developing even more so. Let's stop turning troubled youth into adults with little to no hope. We can do better. We must do better.

Tracie Guy-Decker, Baltimore City

There is a reason why we have different charging rules for children and adults; children remain children. Society's inability to see black and brown children AS children is an enormous inequity that this Act can begin to solve.

Karen Caplan, Montgomery County

Kids should be held accountable when they make mistakes, but should be treated as children. Their cases should start in juvenile court, and it should be up to a judge to determine if the case should move to adult court. In the meantime, they will be able to access services and will be held with others their own age.

Judy Tyson-Kopolow, Montgomery County

Maryland should not be a leader in the country (2nd to only Alabama) in sending more youth to adult court based on offense type per capita! The YES – Youth Equity and Safety Act – bill does not stop children from being prosecuted in adult court; it only requires them to have their cases start in juvenile court. Right now, 87% of cases in Maryland that start in Adult Court are sent back to juvenile court or dismissed. What a waste of time, talent and taxpayers money.

Miner Brown, Baltimore City

Kids are kids. They have not finished developing their brains until they are in their late 20s. They think they are immortal & have no real understanding of consequence.

Heidi Schloss, Baltimore City

It's simply wrong to treat children the same as adults in the courts. Children often can not make independent decisions due to immaturity and strong influence of peers and adults. There is a serious racial imbalance in application of criminal codes which is important to overcome. But frankly resolving this problem goes way beyond racial disparity

Mark Wolff, Montgomery County

For so many reasons. Children deserve to be treated as children. There is so much harm from starting kids out immediately in the adult system. Harm to the child, to their families, to the future.

Jacquelyn Shelton, Baltimore City

The YES Act addresses a civil rights issue considering most of the kids it will help are African-Americans who have felt the brunt of legal discrimination. Likewise, it promotes public safety by reducing recidivism caused by jailing teens into the adult system.

Marlon Tilghman, Harford County

We know children are not adults. We know that youth incarceration is wrong for so many reasons. We know Maryland automatically sends more kids to adult court than CA, IA, MA, AZ, and PA combined. This must stop. That's why I support the YES Act.

Peta Richkus, Baltimore County

Children are children. Period. No act or behavior changes that fact. Support, educate, and care for our children. We are locking up and criminalizing our own future instead of encouraging and empowering them to create a better future. "

Kelli Cover, Baltimore City

This legislation will help Maryland join other states that have committed to providing our young people with opportunities to rehabilitate after offenses. Juvenile courts exist for the purpose of allowing juveniles fair and equitable treatment. Let's fully use it and give them a shot at making better choices.

Christopher Blackwell, Baltimore City

Children are children. 14 isn't an adult. Their brains aren't even fully developed.

Rivka, Prince George's County

As an educator in Baltimore City, I learned the importance of holding kids accountable with care. Kids should have the opportunity to be treated as kids and learn from their mistakes. By automatically being charged as adults, they miss out on closer collaboration with families and schools that could help improve their chances of avoiding rearrest for more serious offenses. Having the opportunity to be charged in juvenile court gives kids a better chance at becoming productive and contributing citizens while keeping our communities safe. I support the YES Act because it will treat our youth better and help build a more just Maryland.

Rachel McGrain, Baltimore City

Automatically charging children as adults for certain offenses is not only immoral, it's not working to reduce crime. Further, this practice disproportionately affects Black children. Children are growing and developing. They are not adults. They are not ruined or beyond help or redemption. Stopping this practice will help decrease mass incarceration and criminalization of Black children.

Karen DeCamp, Baltimore City

Children are not adults. And we do not treat them as adults when it comes to anything other than putting them in jail. This is a shameful, ageist, and racist practice, and in addition to those problems, it also doesn't result in the rest of the public being safer.

Angela Burneko, Baltimore City

Common law understands that children should be treated differently from adults in the judicial system. Laws that charge children as adults go against natural justice.

Fergal Mullally, Baltimore City

The current state of the justice system where children are charged as adults needs reform. It is white supremacy without question

Eze Jackson, Baltimore City

I support the YES Act because it is WRONG to treat children/teenagers the same as adults. There is research that shows the brain is still forming and adolescent brains are NOT the same as adults.

Carla Trevizo, Howard County

Brains are not fully developed until 25. Automatically trying juveniles as adults goes against the science that they have the same brain capabilities as adults. Additionally auto charge takes autonomy away from those involved in the case who may have better information as to how to proceed.

Elizabeth Testa, Baltimore County

Automatic charging of children as adults is needlessly cruel. It presumes that children as young as 14 are not, in fact, children at all based on the offense they are charged with. This bill still allows judges to use discretion and decide to charge a child as an adult on a case by case basis, but requires that all children have their cases begin in juvenile court, as they should be.

Elise Desiderio, Baltimore City

I support the YES Act because charging juveniles as juveniles one, it prevents them from being detained with adults which puts them at significantly increased risk for sexual abuse, solitary confinement, and attempted and completed suicide (which, yes, can and does happen even during the first few days detained while awaiting a hearing); two, it provides for a more holistic, therapeutic, rehabilitative, and accountable justice experience for charged youth, is proven to better support youth in reintegrating into society via the education and therapeutic supports they receive while incarcerated AND when released (that youth charged as adults do not receive), and three, because research shows us that it leads to lower rates of recidivism and higher public safety. Isn't this what everyone wants? Plenty of other states have ended automatic charging of youth as adults; there's already a roadmap for this. Why is Maryland waiting?

Laura Camarata, Prince George's County

My son was charged immediately with 2nd degree murder and only after his attorney petitioned for a juvenile transfer, was juvenile court considered. His transfer hearing seemed like a farce and he was ultimately denied. We are now 10 years later and he accepted a plea of suspended time which we knew would ultimately land him back in jail for any violation. Kids are kids and their cognitive thinking is different and they need mental health services along with the punishment of incarceration.

Walidah Yaminah, Baltimore City and Anne Arundel

Children's brains are not fully developed. They need to be tried as juveniles.

Carol Rice, Baltimore City

The school-to-prison pipeline must be stopped!

Perish Barnette, Baltimore City

All cases, regardless of the seriousness of the offense, should begin in juvenile court because a decision to transfer a case involving a young person to adult court should be based on an individualized assessment of the particular young person, not simply on the offense.

Research confirms that laws that facilitate trying young people in adult court do not have the desired deterrent effect and increase the rate of recidivism. Youth charged in adult court are more likely to be rearrested with more serious offenses compared to youth who had their cases heard in juvenile court for the same charges.

Daisy Thompson, Montgomery County

Children's brains are not fully formed. Children who commit crimes are little adults. They can be held accountable and the community can be kept safe in other ways.

Alison Snow, Montgomery County

As a physician I know that teenagers should not be charged as adults. Their brains are not fully formed. Teenagers need care and rehabilitation. Jailing them only leads to recidivism.

Kate Sugarman, Montgomery County

As a family physician, I know that adolescent brains are fundamentally different from adult brains - our justice system needs to acknowledge this. We must start from a place of assuming teenagers are acting as teens, rather than adults.

Jessica Friedman, Baltimore City

I support passing the YES Act and ending autocharge. This is an issue of racial justice. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have ended the automatic charging of youth as adults.

Bilal Askaryar, Baltimore City

I support the YES Act because I believe it will result in a safer, more just community. Juveniles should not be automatically charged with adult crimes, as this means youth are then booked and processed in the adult system. Youths charged as adults are more likely to experience physical abuse, sexual abuse, and isolation from their families than youths charged through the juvenile court system. Moreover, youths processed through the adult criminal system are less likely to receive rehabilitative services, which leads to an increased risk of recidivism. According to the US Dept. of Justice, to best achieve reductions in recidivism, we need to minimize the number of juveniles that enter the criminal justice system; this is why I support the YES Act.

Amy Ruddle, Montgomery County

Automatic incarceration for young people 18 or young is not a good idea. Many studies have shown that rehab – and I do not mean a change gang – has shown that there is a much reduced rate of recidivism when properly used.

Graydon Moss, Montgomery County

As a teacher for almost two decades, I have had a lot of experience working with youth. Their brains are still developing and it is our responsibility as adults to steer them onto paths that are most beneficial to them socially and emotionally, and also to our community. Nobody benefits when youths are automatically treated like adults when they make a mistake – we need prosecutorial discretion in dealing with individual cases of children who have been, more often than not, mistreated, neglected, or otherwise not supported.

Ioana Stoica, Prince George's

There may be no surer way to increase the risk that a young offender will become an adult criminal than to automatically charge him or her as an adult and put him or her on the path to prison. Criminal court should be reserved for the most egregious cases, and the default in all cases should be to charge as a juvenile. This will make our state safer in the long run.

Steve Metalitz, Montgomery County

As an adult who spent juvenile time going through the court system, I know the effect the process has on the young brain. Let us as a community not inflict undue stress upon people who are finding themselves in dire straits from conditions that they did not create. If the majority of cases are moved to adult court and then back down to juvenile court, it almost seems to me to be a wasteful and abusive use of state funds. We should make sure that Maryland is leaning forward in the foxhole to find solutions for youth offenders beyond auto charging.

KeSean Johnson, Baltimore City