



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HB 749 - Juvenile Court – Concurrent Jurisdiction – Juvenile Offenses on Military Installations

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

Date: March 2, 2023

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports the use of specialized judges, counseling services, and coordination of programs and services provided by the state agencies in the administration of juvenile cases. We also believe that for these programs and services to be effective, they must be geared to working with the families of the juveniles involved.

HB 749 provides for the exercise of concurrent jurisdiction with federal courts for cases involving juveniles for offenses on military installations in Maryland, provided the federal court waives its exclusive jurisdiction and the offense would be a crime under state law. This will allow a case-by-case evaluation of the exercise of concurrent jurisdiction. In general, the specialized programs and services for juveniles are more readily available in the state's juvenile courts than in the federal system, which is focused on adult offenders.

The League's position took into consideration numerous scientific studies that document the late development of the prefrontal cortex of the human brain. This late development accounts for adolescents' poor decision-making and risk-taking without fully appreciating consequences. In addition, a minor's capacity to understand legal terminology and procedures when treated as an adult makes them extremely vulnerable within the system. Juvenile courts have procedures adapted to deal with youth, as well as the authority and resources to craft sentences appropriate to the individual offender.

Because the provision of services tailored to the needs of juveniles is essential for the successful implementation of this bill, we also urge the General Assembly to work with the Governor to ensure that juvenile justice services are adequately funded.

SB 115 (a cross-file of this bill) has passed the Senate. Thus, the League hopes the House will have an opportunity to vote on this important measure. We urge a favorable report on HB 749.