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HB0096 SUPPORT
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)
House of Delegates Judiciary Committee
Thursday March 2, 2023 at 1:00pm

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing in support of HB0096 - the YES Act. I am a resident of District 27B. I am also a volunteer with Baltimore Courtwatch. I have observed thousands of cases since the start of the pandemic, including cases involving children charged as adults.

I support this bill because I believe that children should not be in the adult system. This does not increase public safety, rather it decreases safety. It greatly impacts a child's development and has lifelong consequences. It should be extraordinary circumstances that place them there. I believe it is the state's responsibility to prove why the situation is so far outside the norm that it needs to be moved to the adult system.

As a courtwatch volunteer, the children charged as adults are some of the hardest cases to hear. Far too often I hear of children being denied much needed services solely based on their adult charges. The case of the child in severe mental health crises who was being denied a bed at any of the juvenile mental health facilities open to those in custody because they will not accept children who have adult charges. The child who had been thrown out of their house for being gay not able to access specialized services or to get specialized housing due to his adult charges. Both would have been able to get the much needed help in the juvenile system.

Not only are mental health services, housing opportunities, and support services denied them, their schooling is greatly interrupted. Many of the children I hear in bail review are only getting packets with no instructions, or no school materials at all. With the back up in the trials and transfer hearings, some children are aging out of the juvenile and being moved to adult jails, losing what little access they have to schooling.

For all these reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB0093

Peggy Amacker