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Written Testimony
House Bill 96 - Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)
Judiciary Committee | March 2, 2023

SUPPORT

Background: HB96, if enacted, would stop the automatic charging of youth in adult court. Currently in Maryland, children as young 14 can be automatically charged as adults for certain criminal charges.

This bill does not preclude children to be tried as adults, it only precludes them from automatically beginning their legal process in adult court for certain criminal charges.

Written Comments: Maryland sends more youth to adult court than any other state besides Alabama. In 2021, Maryland sent more children to adult court than Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined.

Children who start in the adult system are more likely to regress and engage in more violent crimes. Further, choosing to charge these individuals as adults highlights large racial disparities, where over 80% of children charged as adults are Black. Unfortunately, those children are much more likely to receive longer sentences in adult prison than White children.

Services and treatment that are offered in juvenile facilities are evidence-based and preventative. By starting these cases in juvenile court, we not only save the state money and time, but also create better outcomes for these children.

The Baltimore Jewish Council believes that children are society's most vital future resources, yet one of its most vulnerable classes. When our youth are charged with crimes, great care should be taken to ensure that the justice system provides them with fair opportunities for growth. The mandatory charges of children as adults should be avoided at all costs.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report on HB96.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies, and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.