



HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

COURAGE HONOR INTEGRITY

House Bill 1180 - Oppose

Criminal Law- Youth Accountability and Safety Act

Letter of opposition to the House Judiciary Committee

March 2, 2023

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, I am pleased to submit my written testimony in opposition to House Bill 1180.

With crime, and especially violent crime, continuing to increase throughout the state of Maryland; legislation such as House Bill 1180 continues to send the wrong message to citizens of Maryland about how our leaders plan to keep our community safe. This legislation has the word "Accountability" in the title, yet it lessens the penalty and sets up a different standard for an individual under the age of 25 who commits the most heinous crime, taking another human's life.

The Maryland Legislature must take note of the significant changes they are making that are negatively impacting public safety in the State of Maryland. Just last year the change in law that will not permit police to criminally charge or even interview any suspect under the age of 13 has already been shown to have significant negative impacts on public safety. In Anne Arundel County a 12-year-old brought a gun to school knowing they would not be held accountable. In Harford County, a 12-year-old male student touched female students inappropriately at a dance, but no charges could be filed, and police could not speak to the suspect. In Somerset County, a School Resource Officer was assaulted by a student under the age of 13 and no charges could be filed, or action taken against the student. These are just a few examples of how wrong it is to move away from holding individuals accountable for committing criminal acts. Where is the accountability and where is the justice for the victims and innocent children that have been negatively affected by these actions?

House Bill 1180 is so much more of an egregious step in this same anti-public safety direction. Over the last ten years the Harford County Sheriff's Office has investigated and closed 60 separate homicide cases. Of those cases, 25% of them involved a suspect who was under the age of 25 years old, with the youngest suspect being 15 years old. Of

these cases involving an individual under the age of 25, 83% of them were initially charged with first degree murder. To say that these murderers should not face the most serious of consequences for the most serious of offense is not just wrong, it is offensive to the memory of every victim of homicide and the family members who are left to grieve. It again is an effort be some in the legislature to make excuses for the inexcusable.

With the interest of every law-abiding citizen in our state, I ask the members of the committee to hold criminals accountable, regardless of age. We cannot continue to weaken accountability, which has been proven to have negative impacts on public safety in our communities. I ask for an unfavorable report on HB 1180.

Respectfully Offered,

Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler