



## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support of HB 96: Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland  
Criminal Justice Lead Advocate  
DATE: March 2, 2023

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) asks for a favorable report for **HB 96: Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)**.

The issue of Juvenile Justice calls us to uphold our second principle- compassion, equity and justice for ourselves and society. The growth and development stages of juveniles and adults are too different to automatically give similar sentences on criminal behavior. Automatic charging of juveniles as adults is NOT fair. Every criminal situation needs to be evaluated, keeping the physical and mental condition of the perpetrator in mind, as well as the age. By beginning each juvenile offender in the juvenile system, the juvenile can be better assessed to see if they are eligible for services– which are more available in the juvenile system than the adult system– that could help the juvenile to transform into someone who contributes to society instead of another number in the system.

Starting them in adult prison is not only more time consuming and expensive, but it has a detrimental mental impact on the juvenile, even if they are then transferred to the juvenile system. The bill does still allow a prosecutor the discretion to charge and try violent offenders of horrific crimes as adults, as well.

Maryland’s prisons have the worst racial population disparity in the country. Blacks make up 30% of the state population, but they make up about 70% of our prison population! Some of this begins while they are juveniles. Again, while composing about 30% of the population under 13 years old, black students, mostly boys, make up 84% of Maryland's under 13 **incarcerated** population! Of the juveniles charged as adults, 93% were boys and 88.77% were black. (Statistics from the DJS 2023)

Prison research reveals that being “Smart on Crime” is more effective than being “Tough on Crime.” We can show compassion AND be “Smart about Crime” by involving our juveniles, while restricted, in educational and rehabilitative programs which are not as readily available to them in adult prisons.

The UULM-MD asks for a favorable vote on HB 96.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Karen Clark*

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