

Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 2, 2023
HB 96 – Youth Equity and Safety Act

FAVORABLE

To Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 96, the Youth Equity and Safety Act (“YES Act”). As a parent, a public defender and community member, I urge you to pass this important legislation.

As a youth defender for 20 years, I have seen the devastating impact of our current law on hundreds of children and their families. In sum, no children should have to experience Maryland’s jails and prisons. Over the years, I have received numerous calls from the local jail about suicide attempts and mental health breakdowns after my youth clients are held in isolation for long periods without access to mental health treatment. Children sentenced to prison often face even worse conditions with less hope for release. We Marylanders are fortunate to have a new Governor who believes that we should “leave no one behind.” Warehousing children in our jails and prisons is leaving our most vulnerable population behind.

As a parent and community member, I want our schools and communities to be safe. The best way to do that is to treat the underlying causes of delinquent behavior by working to eradicate poverty and investing in our schools and programs for our children. Numerous studies show that children are less likely to recidivate if we provide them with treatment through the juvenile court.

As Nelson Mandela said, “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” I ask you to vote for this bill so that Maryland can join the 26 other states that treat children like children in their court systems. I urge a favorable vote on HB 96.

Sincerely,
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