



House Bill 96
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)
Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults
March 2, 2023
Support

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

Baltimore Youth Arts is a creative job training program that provides artistic and professional opportunities to young people ages 14-25, with a focus on those involved in the justice system.

Baltimore Youth Arts is submitting this testimony in support of HB96, the Youth Equity and Safety Act, which would make our communities safer and make our youth justice system more equitable by ensuring that all juveniles begin their cases in the juvenile court system. In Maryland, if a child as young as 14 is charged with one of 33 offenses, they can be tried in adult court. 87% of these charges, which are determined by police officers, do not result in criminal convictions. Many of the 87% of children charged as adults lost access to necessary services, their communities, families, schools, and other potential supports. Maryland is out of step with other states and international human rights law. No other country in the world routinely sends children to adult jails and prisons.

The United States juvenile court system was developed because children were understood to be different than adults. Children charged in adult court are less likely to have access to the intensive services that benefit a young person's development and have been demonstrated to reduce their engagement in future crimes. Research has shown that trying youth in the adult system has failed as a deterrent and that sentencing children in adult court results in higher recidivism rates than among youth charged with similar offenses in juvenile court.

Trying children in adult court undermines the purpose of the juvenile court system, relies on punishment rather than rehabilitation, and conflicts with what we know from developmental science. Children's brains are vastly different than adults. An adolescent brain is still developing and is highly influenced by immediate reward and peer pressure.¹ A just legal system would consider adolescent brain development and the potential negative impact of adult court on children when evaluating their actions. We must treat our children as children and work to support them through adolescence.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB96.

Gianna Rodriguez
Gianna Rodriguez

¹ Juvenile Justice and the Adolescent Brain <https://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/juvenilejustice/>