

Date of Hearing: March 2, 2023

Heidi Rhodes
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**TESTIMONY ON HB0096 - POSITION: FAVORABLE Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction
(Youth Equity & Safety Act)**

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Heidi Rhodes

OPENING: My name is Heidi Rhodes. I am a resident of District 4. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0096, the Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & 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.

I am a retired federal employee who organizes for social justice with the Oseh Shalom synagogue. As a Jew I often express my relationship to the infinite through *l'dor vador* which translates as "from one generation to the next." This means that we must act as the infinite would, in a fair and balanced way in relation to all of our children, and have a relationship with our children that is based on age-appropriate justice and the principles of treating them as innocent until proven guilty or juveniles until proven that their alleged crimes are such that they should be treated as adults. Having raised a child to adulthood, I know that their brains are not fully adult with all the ability to project the consequences of their actions before taking those actions.

Maryland sends more young people to adult court based on offense type, per capita, than any other state except for Alabama. We can and must treat our youth better. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have passed laws to treat kids like kids and limit the pathways into adult courts. Seven states (California, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Tennessee and Texas) already start all cases involving their youth in their juvenile courts. When young people are automatically charged in adult court, they are more likely to reoffend, sooner, with more violent crime than children who are charged in juvenile court. This practice undermines the purpose of the juvenile court system, pursues punishment rather than rehabilitation, and conflicts with what we know from developmental science.

Furthermore, laws that allow youth to be tried in adult court reflect and reinforce the racial inequities that characterize the justice system in the United States. The Yes Act promotes racial justice. 81% of youth charged in adult court in Maryland are Black. Black youth are more likely to be sent to adult prison and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts for similar offenses.

True safety in our society must come from treating everyone fairly and focusing on treatment and not punishment. This is especially true for our most vulnerable, our children. This bill will help achieve the goal of a safe and just society for all in Maryland.. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0096.**