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February 8, 2024

Re: Testimony in Opposition of SB 0744
Juvenile Law - Reform

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am a beneficiary of the Juvenile Restoration Act (JuvRA). Having been adjudicated as an adult in the Criminal Justice System at the age of fifteen, served over 42 years of a life sentence, engaged in specialized treatment for eleven of those years, counseled hundreds of at-risk youth from prison, taught and mentored incarcerated peers, and being released to become a parole advocate and reentry coach, I cannot support SB 0744.

While I am a loyal enthusiast of public safety, accountability, and just desserts, I fail to recognize the restorative justice component of such sweeping reform. In fact, I believe some of these changes will cause irreparable harm. I fear for today's troubled youth, hard-line reactions from adults, and the future of Maryland's society.

Less than two year ago, the legislature took great care in Juvenile Justice Reform. It seems that repeals to those laws are being made without giving the existing laws adequate time to work. Why is it necessary to specify more than a ten year old "alleged to have committed an act: That, if committed by an adult, would constitute a crime of violence" enough? After all, we are talking about a fifth grader.

I question whether the Department of Juvenile Services is even equipped to accommodate a couple dozen fifth graders. Ideally, subjecting delinquent youth to juvenile services is to protect and prevent our children harming themselves and others and not incurring the collateral consequences adult criminals face. However, recognizing the ignorance, impulsiveness, and nearsightedness of children, we are turning blind eyes to the outcome of so-called "accountability" campaign.

This disconnect may be from not recognizing the need to talk to impacted youth and those who interact with these troubled youth. Experience leads me to believe that the vast majority of Elementary and Middle School aged children inducted into the Juvenile

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Justice System suffer horribly and are likely to increase in delinquent behavior. I can personally attest to the similar reality of juvenile offenders adjudicated in the adult system becoming more damaged and prone to crime.

Sixty year old me remains remorseful for my crimes as a fifteen year old, and I make a concentrated effort to atone for my transgressions every day. I am among the rare wayward youth who somehow managed to survive a horrible fate. I am a gainfully employed taxpayer, a husband and expectant father, an advocate for juvenile justice and criminal justice reform, and a recidivism interrupter. Sometimes, I wonder how my life could have been had I chose not to commit crimes or I was treated as a child offender rather than a miniature adult.

I do not want other children to suffer as I have. I support investments in prevention, treatment, and viable alternatives/option which in no way undermine accountability. These children are our future. Thus, I urge this honorable committee not to vote favorably for SB 0744.

Truly yours,

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