



Testimony for **SB 744**
Juvenile Law – Reform
Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. 1199SEIU is the largest healthcare workers union in the nation with over 400,000 members in the east coast in hospitals, long term care, and clinics. In Maryland, 1199SEIU represents over 10,000 healthcare workers. As health justice advocates who believe overcriminalization is a public health crisis, 1199SEIU opposes SB 744.

No child should be at risk of system involvement, and if they are involved with the legal system, they and their families should receive every opportunity to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives. We believe that youth who commit crimes should be held accountable through sufficient diversion programs that meet the financial, emotional, mental, and physical needs of youth who deserve the opportunity to right wrongs with the conditions that set them up for success. Extending probation will not set up children for success.

This legislation exacerbates racial disparities and does not provide policy solutions that will improve youth behavior. SB 744 puts more youth in harm's way with over-exposure to the criminal legal system. That is inherently racist in practice and policy, because over incarceration disproportionately impacts Black and Brown kids.

This legislation punishes kids for the failure of the state to provide timely services. Research has consistently shown that community-based programs are most effective in improving kids' long-term outcomes – including reduced reoffending, educational attainment, improved behavioral health, and stronger family support. Maintaining and building connections with families and other support systems are vital to healing and behavioral change.

For these reasons and more, 1199SEIU opposes SB 744 and urges the committee to issue an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,
Ricarra Jones
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