

February 9, 2024
David M. Friedman
Silver Spring, MD

TESTIMONY ON SB0744 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
Juvenile Law - Reform

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: David M. Friedman

My name is David Friedman. I am a resident of District 14 in Colesville/Cloverly. I am submitting this testimony against SB0744, Juvenile Law - Reform.

I am an active member of Oseh Shalom, a Jewish Reconstructionist congregation located in Laurel, MD. Jewish tradition emphasizes that the Divine encompasses both justice and mercy and that all of us deserve a life with dignity, respect and safety. I also closely followed the testimony, compelling stories, and research that resulted in passing the Juvenile Justice Reform Act (JJRA) in 2021, which used an informed approach to combat juvenile crime by addressing the racial disparities and poor outcomes of overly punitive approaches. Thus, I find it very alarming that, only 18 months after JJRA's enactment, leadership seeks to return Maryland to failed policies and disproved theories, responding to fear stoked by conservative media outlets rather than over 20 years of research and data on the most effective ways to hold kids accountable and improve safety.

While the proposed creation of a new Commission on Juvenile Reform and Emerging and Best Practices would build on the Juvenile Justice Reform Council created by JJRA, the overarching themes of SB0744 are to bring young children into the juvenile court system rather than invest in programming and services that are proven to change behavior. The impact of SB0744 will be to incarcerate more children, especially Black and brown children who are statistically moved into Maryland's juvenile justice system more than other children. I believe that communities do not want Maryland's resources focused on filling detention facilities when proactive efforts to address the underlying causes of these behaviors are more effective. A bill more serious about enhancing public safety in Maryland would allow the new Commission to build on progress made since enactment of JJRA and promote safety over punishment.

I recognize the intent of leadership to hold our public safety system accountable, but the proposed legislation places most of the burden on kids in the system rather on the system itself. **I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on SB0744.**