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*Legislative District 24*  
Prince George's County

MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

Education, Business and  
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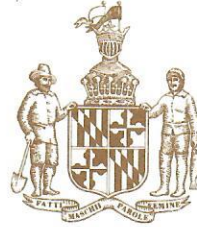
*Joint Committees*

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**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson**

**SBD314: Juvenile Law**  
**Willful Misconduct of a Minor-Civil Liability of a Parent, Legal Guardian, or Custodian**  
**(Parental Accountability Act)**

**Good afternoon, Chairman Will Smith, Vice Chairman Jeff Waldstreicher, and members of The Judiciary Committee. I am here to present SBD314 Juvenile Law-Parental Accountability**

The need to establish parental accountability laws cannot be overstated. We must take immediate action to ensure that parents, legal guardians, or custodians are held civilly accountable for any damages caused by their unemancipated children. The proposed bill aims to impose affirmative duties on parents to provide for their children's basic needs and prevent any neglect or abandonment. It is a well-established fact that every state has some form of parental responsibility law that holds parents liable for intentional or willful acts by their unemancipated children resulting in property damage, personal injury, or death to another person. California Civil Code § 1714.1(a) states that any act of willful misconduct by a minor resulting in injury shall be imputed to the parent, who shall be jointly and severally liable with the unemancipated child for any damages resulting from the willful misconduct.

The proposed bill seeks to strengthen and expand these laws to ensure that parents are more involved in the lives of their unemancipated children. Several states like Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Oregon require parents to attend counseling or other court-ordered treatment programs. Other state legislation such as Arkansas, Colorado, Texas, and Wisconsin require parents, legal guardians, and custodians to participate in parent training and responsibility courses. These types of programs are a diversion option that defers any further punitive sanction from the court.

Violating these laws will lead to increased participation by parents, as defined by the Administrative Office of The Court. Financial responsibility may not exceed \$25,000 for any willful misconduct of the unemancipated child, including medical, dental, and hospital expenses, resulting in the injury or death of another person or damage to the property of another.

We cannot ignore the importance of this proposed bill. It is our moral obligation to protect our society from the consequences of parental negligence. The bill is a critical step toward achieving this goal and ensuring that parents are accountable for their unemancipated children's actions. Therefore, we must take immediate action to enforce these laws and prevent harmful and illegal activities by unemancipated children.

Thus, we kindly request your complete support for this crucial bill.