

SB0744_JoShifrin_UNFAVORABLE

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB0744 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Juvenile Law - Reform

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

FROM: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony against SB0744, Juvenile Law - Reform.

I am Jewish, a retiree, and a resident of Bethesda for the past 10 years. My Jewish values tell me that all of us deserve a life with dignity, respect, and safety. Jewish tradition teaches that the Divine encompasses both justice and mercy.

Maryland made great strides when it passed the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act. But this proposed legislation (SB0744) undermines several provisions of that law, for example, under SB0744:

- The law requires the State's Attorney's Office (SAO) to review all felonies, even those that are non-violent;
- The law requires the SAO to review all intake decisions if a child is charged with a new crime while under supervision by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS);
- The law requires that a child charged with a misdemeanor will be detention-eligible if they have two priors OR they are currently under DJS supervision when the new offense happens and the offense has a penalty of 90 days (the penalty for virtually all misdemeanors)
- The law creates a technical violation of probation for 2 or more unexcused absences at a treatment program ordered by the court, despite the fact a child is often not in charge of or able to access transportation.

This law ignores more than 20 years of research and data on the most effective way to hold children accountable when they break the law. It also disregards information proven to improve safety in our communities.

Real safety comes from solutions that prevent crime from occurring in the first place. Policy makers should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities and improve people's quality of life, like good schools and engaging after school activities, treatment for mental health and drug addiction, community-led gun violence prevention and gun violence interruption programs, affordable and stable housing, and training programs and internships.

As written, SB0744 will make our communities less safe by punishing children who need support. This bill will see many more children incarcerated every year, and this will fall hardest on Black and brown children, exacerbating the existing racial disparities in the juvenile justice system and in society.

I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on SB0744.