



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

DAWN LUEDTKE
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 7

February 8, 2024

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 744, *Juvenile Law - Reform*

Dear Chair Smith,

I write in support of your jointly sponsored legislation with President Ferguson, Juvenile Law - Reform Bill (SB 744). I want to thank President Ferguson, you, and Vice Chair Waldstreicher for your thoughtful discussions with stakeholders regarding these issues over the last six months. While differing perspectives have been presented on this topic, I believe we are all unified in a desire to do better for Maryland's children and ensure appropriate interventions and services for those affected. Senate Bill 744 carefully addresses gaps and needs within the existing juvenile justice system, facilitates better interagency cooperation through procedural mechanisms, and focuses on narrowly-tailored corrective actions.

The bill proposes to expand the jurisdiction of the juvenile court to include children between the ages of 10-13 who are alleged to have committed the serious offenses that are creating the greatest disruption of public safety. This proposal serves a dual purpose. First, it will help connect these children with services needed to assist with underlying issues that may have led to the conduct while also instilling some measure of accountability for these egregious acts. Second, public safety professionals have identified an alarming trend across the State in children younger than 13 being coerced into committing these acts on behalf of adults or older children because it became common knowledge that they could not be arrested for the offenses.

Missed opportunities to engage with at-risk youth and provide appropriate interventions within the juvenile justice system over the past decade have also yielded a noticeable increase in crimes of violence and other weapons-related offenses committed by young adults (18-25 years old) in Montgomery County. To put some of these escalating issues involving juvenile and young adult offenders into perspective, I offer the following statistics from Montgomery County:

- Auto thefts from 2019 through 2023 involving juveniles or young adults (ages 18-25) increased by 132%, with a 289% increase in juvenile auto thefts during that time period.
- Crimes committed by juveniles involving use of a deadly weapon increased from 214 in 2019 to 359 in 2023.
- During the period of 2019 through 2023, there were a total of 1,177 weapons-involved offenses committed by juveniles, including 473 involving a firearm.¹
- During the period of 2019 through 2023, there were a total of 1,907 weapons-involved offenses committed by young adults, with 1,247 involving a firearm.²

Throughout the hearings held in the Judiciary Committee this fall, as well as in our own hearing on this topic before the Montgomery County Council, we learned of significant delays in children receiving services after a referral to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). The modifications to juvenile law provisions set forth in SB744 would reduce the time for an intake officer to evaluate whether the court has jurisdiction and determine if it is appropriate for judicial action. SB744 also mandates immediate action by the intake officers following that evaluation that will make a significant difference in efficiency and ensure that referred matters are not left to languish without decision. SB744 also bridges the gap between intake officers and State's Attorney's Offices to allow for subsequent review of referrals where, under current law, the State's Attorney's Office would never know the matters existed. It also expedites the handling of matters where a juvenile who is already under the supervision of DJS engages in subsequent delinquent conduct, and mandates the written documentation of interactions between law enforcement and juveniles who are referred to DJS. All of these measures are designed to be curative, not punitive.

It is my sincere hope that this strengthening of procedural measures and expansion of the jurisdiction to include not just crimes of violence but other significant and serious offenses impacting our communities will result in an overall reduction of incidents. These actions can help deliver to the youth involved needed services and rehabilitative measures. Ensuring that services are delivered in a timely fashion, appropriate oversight is in place, and all parties to the system are collaborative rather than siloed will ensure the best chance for affected youth to

¹ Of the weapons-involved offenses involving juveniles during this time period, 17 were classified as homicides, 4 were rapes, 349 were robberies, 183 were aggravated assaults, and 451 were other weapons offenses.

² Of the weapons-involved offenses involving young adults during this time period, 65 were homicides, 10 were rapes, 405 were robberies, 499 were aggravated assaults, 56 were auto thefts, and 658 were other weapons offenses.

refrain from repeating the delinquent conduct and transition into adulthood as successful members of our community.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dawn Luedtke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "L".

Dawn Luedtke
Montgomery County Councilmember, District 7

cc: Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee