

Hello,

I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 814 (HB 814), the Juvenile Law Reform legislation which seeks to roll back the progress we have made in this state through the passage of the Juvenile Justice Reform and Child Interrogation Protection Act.

Children are our most vulnerable population that needs to be protected, especially within the legal system. In Maryland, children as young as seven years old can be ensnared in the legal system. In order to systematically address public safety we must focus on policies that work such as; improving schools, expanding affordable housing, bolstering treatment for mental health and drug addiction, and creating well-paying jobs. These are real solutions. The General Assembly should also take measures to increase the use of the CINS (Child in Need of Supervision) system. After twenty years of research, the data has shown that age-appropriate support systems and services are more effective at keeping kids out of trouble and without prioritizing incarceration.

HB 814 is harmful to Maryland children because it focuses on criminalization rather than investing in services that focus on the restoration, healing, and support that is needed, which data has shown is the most effective, to reduce crime. This bill would remove important provisions from the Juvenile Justice Reform Act such as preventing law enforcement from referring a child for immediate services including: local care teams, youth service bureaus' prevention services, and law enforcement based diversion programs. This provision goes far beyond data collection and prevents critical services from being provided. If the goal is to reduce youth crime, this committee should be working to uphold and pass new legislation to bolster wraparound, preventative services that support children before crimes are committed. We need to be serious about safety and ending the school to prison pipeline, which means focusing on policies that work.

Respectfully,

Philip Ateto