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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION to SB744
Juvenile Law – Reform

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Samantha Blau

My name is Samantha Blau, I am a resident of Baltimore's Patterson Place neighborhood, in District 46.

Year after year this group of legislators hears from sheriffs, police, and state's attorneys about how bad the "bad" kids are. The only recommendation law enforcement can make is to throw the book at these kids. And year after year this committee hears from their own appointed work group, from the state's Department of Juvenile Services, from experts in child development, and from former youth caught up in the system that creating harsher punishment will not deter children from involvement with the justice system, nor improve the lives of kids in crisis.

The work this committee does can be scarily easy. You can pass SB744 out of committee and it will be voted on by the full chamber. In less than a month you can go back to your constituents and say that you were tough on crime, and pretend that you have made Maryland safer. The lives of the children that your actions will affect will continue to be hard and unsafe. A child in crisis, that lives in a home or community where they can access a gun, that does not have the material and emotional support they need will not be made whole by this bill. They also will not be prevented from spreading the harm they are experiencing, they will still steal a car, or rob a store, or physically harm someone else. Like a train derailing because the brakes were out of order will not be prevented by a sign noting a curve, a child who is hurt, without support, and acting out cannot be stopped because the criminal code now carries larger penalties.

The work of preventing crime is difficult and expensive. It will only be achieved with strong social safety nets; universal access to healthcare and mental healthcare, universal basic income, universal pre-K, better pay and support for teachers and school support staff, increased funding for libraries, park and rec departments, and other safe third spaces. The easy way forward is to pass this bill and pretend to not know what the right thing is for these kids. The hard work of the job is to listen to advocates and experts, think creatively, and be willing to pass legislation that makes a positive change.

I urge this committee to choose to do the hard work and to issue an unfavorable report on SB744.