



# NAACP

Maryland  
STATE CONFERENCE

March 26, 2024

Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB 744 – Juvenile Justice - Reform

Members of the Committee:

We are writing to vehemently oppose Senate Bill 744, sponsored by the Senate President. This bill, while purporting to reform aspects of the juvenile justice system, presents significant concerns regarding its potential impact on racial equity and the well-being of our youth, particularly those from marginalized communities.

The Racial Impact Note associated with Senate Bill 744 highlights critical issues that cannot be ignored. One of the most alarming aspects is the expansion of the juvenile court's jurisdiction over youth between 10 and 12 years of age. This provision raises serious questions about the treatment of preteens within the justice system, especially considering the recognized limitations in their neurocognitive capacity and understanding of legal proceedings.

The historical context of policies leading to mass youth incarceration cannot be overlooked. Throughout history, we have witnessed the detrimental effects of harsh and punitive measures targeting young individuals. These policies not only fail to address underlying issues but also perpetuate cycles of poverty, trauma, and systemic racism. By lowering the age at which children can be subjected to the juvenile justice system, Senate Bill 744 risks further criminalizing our youth and exacerbating these harmful trends.

While the bill may offer access to services for younger juveniles, it fails to address the root causes of their involvement in the justice system. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive data on the racial and ethnic distributions of the youth affected by this bill prevents a full understanding of its potential impacts on racial equity. However, given the existing disparities within the justice system, it is likely that Black youth will bear the brunt of any adverse effects resulting from this legislation.

Furthermore, the Racial Impact Note acknowledges the absence of detailed data on various aspects of the juvenile justice process, including procedures for processing juvenile offenders. Without this critical information, it is irresponsible to push forward with legislation that could have far-reaching consequences, particularly for communities of color.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to reconsider Senate Bill 744 and instead focus on comprehensive reforms that prioritize the well-being and rehabilitation of all youth, regardless of



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their race or socioeconomic status. We cannot afford to enact legislation that perpetuates racial disparities and fails to address the systemic injustices within our juvenile justice system.

In Service,

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