

SB0744_JoShifrin_UNFAVORABLE

Hearing Date: March 26, 2024

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB0744 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Juvenile Law - Reform

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

- Expanded jurisdiction for children who are 10, 11, and 12 years old. *At that age, children are often unable to participate in their own defense,* deemed “incompetent,” and then cannot be given the services they need.
- The law *violates human rights standards,* which set a minimum age of 13 for the arrest of a child.
- 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, instead of investing in programming and services that are proven to change behavior, *SB0744 will make our communities less safe by punishing children who need support.* Moreover, SB0744 does not increase the resources needed by the Department of Juvenile Services to offer children the services they need. This legislation 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.