

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Rianna Eckel, I live in the 43<sup>rd</sup> district, and I was arrested when I was 15. Diversion court in Washington State, where my family lived at the time, ensured I was treated like a kid and helped me thrive without the stigma attached to juvenile offenders. All kids deserve the same opportunity. I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. **I am testifying in opposition to HB814.**



**Showing Up for Racial Justice**

All of us deserve a life with dignity, respect, and safety. But here in Maryland, some elected officials try to make us fear children so they can score political points, keeping us divided and distracted so we won't demand what our families truly need. These prosecutors and lawmakers scapegoat Black children rather than nurture them and provide them with the resources they need to thrive.

Children need stable housing, access to healthy food, good schools, parks to play in, access to health care, and more. They also need to believe that they have people supporting them, and good opportunities available for them. They need to have hope for the future. Rather than criminalizing children, you should spend your time and power to make Maryland a better state for kids. You can't incarcerate your way out of the obvious problem that children aren't having their needs met. Please stop wasting our tax dollars on the carceral system, and get to the root of the problems.

This bill undermines several important provisions of the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act and ignores over 20 years of research and data on the most effective ways to hold kids accountable and improve safety. Instead of investing in programming and services that are proven to change behavior, this legislation will make us less safe by punishing children who need support and giving a pass to our state's dysfunctional law enforcement and juvenile justice systems.

This legislation will see thousands more children incarcerated every year, particularly Black and brown children, exacerbating already serious racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote against **HB814**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Rianna Eckel  
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore