



February 6, 2024

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony OPPOSING HB0814 Juvenile Law - Reform

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify against House Bill 814 Juvenile Law Reform. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

HB814 would change Maryland's juvenile probation laws by extending the probation period of supervised youth for misdemeanors from a maximum initial term of 6 months extendable to 1 year, to a maximum initial term of 1 year extendable to 2 years, and for felonies from a maximum initial term of 1 year extendable to 2 years, to a maximum initial term of 2 years, extendable to 3 years.

Adolescence is a critical period of development where children are particularly susceptible to environmental influences. Lengthening probation periods can exacerbate stress and hinder development by prolonging involvement in the justice system. Our juvenile justice system should be rehabilitative rather than punitive. Extending probation periods prioritizes punishment rather than addressing the underlying contributing factors or providing opportunities for growth.

Research from the National Institute of Justice suggests that prolonged involvement in the justice system can lead to negative outcomes such as stress, adverse emotional consequences, decreased educational prospects, and limited employment opportunities.

Extending probation periods is also costly for both the juvenile justice system and minors involved. Resources spent on monitoring and supervision could be more effectively allocated to programs and services that address underlying contributing factors and support a successful reintegration into society.

There is growing recognition of the importance of evidence-based practices in juvenile justice. Research indicates that shorter, targeted interventions are often more effective than lengthy probation periods in promoting positive outcomes for youth.

Furthermore, each youth involved in the justice system has unique needs and circumstances. A one-size-fits-all approach, such as extending probation periods for all supervised youth, fails to account for individual differences.

Maryland has fought hard for reforms after being tied with five states at one point for being among our country's worst offenders of juvenile justice. CAIR believes its critical to continue

making progress on this issue. We strongly believe that protecting the rights and well-being of children – especially young Black children who stand to be most adversely impacted by this legislation – in our state needs to be a priority.

We oppose this bill because it removes necessary limits between minors and the law and we respectfully urge your vote against it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Email: zchaudry@cair.com