

March 26, 2024
Andrew J. Miller
Baltimore, MD 21209



TESTIMONY ON SB0744
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
Juvenile Law - Reform

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

FROM: Andrew J. Miller

My name is Andrew Miller. I am a resident of District 11. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB0744, Juvenile Law - Reform.

I am chair of the Social Justice Advocacy Committee of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, a large Conservative synagogue in Stevenson, MD; a member of the Baltimore Leadership Council of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ); and co-chair of the Synagogue Social Justice Roundtable which has representatives from 13 synagogue communities in Baltimore and Columbia. For me it is a religious obligation, rooted in Jewish texts and teachings, to speak out in opposition to injustice in our community and our state, and to support measures to remedy injustice. I am submitting this testimony on Behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes more than 6,000 Jews and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

When it comes to juvenile justice, Maryland has a worse record by some measures than any state in the U.S. other than Alabama. In our state, police officers have been recorded placing 5-year-olds and 8, 9, and 10-year-olds in handcuffs for acting out in elementary school. We put teenagers as young as 14 into adult prisons, and then to “protect” them from the adult prisoners we place them in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. And there are enormous racial disparities in who gets this treatment, even for the same offense.

In 2022, we and our partners helped pass the Child Interrogation Protection Act (CIPA) and the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act (JJRA), modest but important steps toward protecting the rights of children in Maryland. Less than six months later, the media onslaught to undermine these laws began to churn, resulting in bills like SB0744. There was no wait for reforms to take effect before rolling them back. Sinclair Broadcasting CEO David Smith and prosecutors around the state have been casting children as the enemies of the state rather than the victims of unjust treatment so they can overturn these critical protections for young people. Smith was recorded

telling reporters at the Baltimore Sun that he could force the House Speaker and Senate President to reverse their positions on juvenile justice and predicted they would do so less than two weeks before this new bill was proposed.

Against the backdrop of an overall long-term decrease in crime and juvenile crime, there has been a spike in carjackings and handgun violations by youth in the last two years. Yes, that has to be dealt with, but we already know that cracking down on children between 10 and 17 does not fix the problem but makes it worse. Instead of increasing maximum probation periods for 10-12-year-old kids, the state needs to prioritize getting them the treatment they need before they hit those existing time limits.

The leaders of our state are claiming SB0744 would result in positive changes. Yet the data shows differently. If we want to do right by our kids, we will ensure they have the chance to bounce back and atone for their mistakes by fully funding and implementing programs that help them do so. SB0744 will do nothing but punish kids and continue a cycle of violence.

For these and other reasons, on behalf of Jews United for Justice, **I respectfully urge an unfavorable report on SB744 unless the bill is amended to only a study and commission.**