



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony SB 744 Juvenile Law - Reform Favorable With Amendments

TO: Senator Will Smith, Jr. Chair and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Karen "Candy" Clark,
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In my Unitarian Universalist faith, we believe that we should honor the individual worth and dignity of all people. As we all know, no child is born "bad". Something in their early life can cause them to be violent, revengeful, mean, etc. When left untreated this can result in humans that are violent and unsafe and need to be restrained and often land in prison. But our prison system is not a warehouse for lost souls.

OUR CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM HAS BASICALLY TWO MAJOR TASKS:

1. To provide a safe environment in which our communities can function and thrive.
And
2. To remove people who are illegally disrupting this environment and/or are a threat to others.

In order to help keep our environment safe, prisoners must be changed and transformed so that they can become productive members of society. Harsh treatment in prison, "tough on crime" and longer sentences have proven ineffective to accomplish this goal. Research has shown that education, self-help classes, restorative practices, cognitive thinking, and other models can help them dig deep and learn to understand themselves and others are the best practices to help people reform and reduce recidivism rates.

Unfortunately, this bill seems to lengthen detentions, and sentences to try to "teach" juveniles to change their behavior.

SB 744 needs more attention to uncovering the real causes of delinquent behavior—which will vary greatly with different juveniles. Learning how to engage with others will help them to re enter our communities as healthy, safe, productive people. This process should begin with all juveniles entering the Juvenile system where their needs can be evaluated and begin their individual transformational path into their future. Maryland has one of the very highest rates of entering juveniles into adult prisons.

We believe that all juveniles should START in the Juvenile System.

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All of this IS NOT EASY. This isn't being "soft on crime". It's being "smart about crime". It takes time, professional resources, caring trained staff and money. We are pleased to see the bills' creation of the COMMISSION ON JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM AND EMERGING AND BEST PRACTICES, which is a step in the right direction.

Respectfully Submitted

Karen Clark

Amendments:

1. All Juveniles should start in the Juvenile System
2. Support services need to be identified and incorporated into best practices.