

February 7, 2025

Andrew J. Miller
Baltimore, MD 21209



TESTIMONY ON SB 531 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Juvenile Justice Restoration Act of 2025

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Andrew Miller, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Andrew Miller. I am a resident of District 11B, Chair of the Social Justice Advocacy Committee at Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Stevenson, MD, and Chair of the Synagogue Social Justice Roundtable, which has representatives from synagogue communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice.

Maryland sends more youth ages 14 to 17 to adult court for more different offenses 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. Overuse of solitary confinement in Maryland prisons violates international standards against torture. And there are enormous racial disparities in who experiences this treatment. As a Maryland voter I am ashamed of this record, and as legislators I hope you are equally ashamed. As a Jewish voter I am motivated by our sacred texts that call on us to pursue justice. Anything that puts children at greater risk by abridging their constitutional rights is a denial of justice.

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. But the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act of 2025 does not restore justice; instead it seeks to undermine the protection of rights written into the Child Interrogation Protection Act, by allowing law enforcement to interrogate kids without the

presence of a lawyer. Please ask yourselves whether you would want law enforcement officers to be able to interrogate your own child without the benefit of a lawyer.

We know that children are more vulnerable than adults when it comes to the kind of pressure that might occur during an interrogation. They may not understand their own constitutional rights in the same way as adults, and may be manipulated into yielding those rights. The existing law requires children to be remanded to the custody of their parents and to have access to an attorney before they are interrogated. It remedies a serious problem in the administration of criminal justice. Taking away those protections would be a miscarriage of justice, and harm our kids.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this committee to issue an unfavorable report on SB 531 and stand behind the important progress the legislature made by passing the Child Interrogation Protection Act in 2022.