



"Being here for Maryland's Children, Youth, and Families"

Testimony submitted to Senate Judicial Proceedings

February 4, 2025

Senate Bill 422: Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction

Support with Amendment

The Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus (MAYSB), which represents a network of bureaus throughout the State of Maryland, supports SB 422 - Juveniles Courts - Jurisdiction. Youth Service Bureaus provide prevention, intervention and treatment services to youth and their families. SB 422 will eliminate automatic charging for children aged 14 and 15, and reduces the list of charges for 16 and 17 year olds.

MAYSB requests an amendment that would extend the automatic charging for all offenses to all children 17 and younger. This amendment would change where juvenile cases start, and would still allow cases to be waived up to adult court after judicial review. These changes to the current law will allow all to youth begin in the juvenile court system, which MAYSB believes is in line with the State's efforts to have a juvenile justice system that is developmentally informed.

A developmentally informed approach to juvenile justice recognizes the need to hold youth accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources and opportunities to be rehabilitated. It recognizes that youth are still maturing and that their brains are not fully developed until after age 24. Youth who commit violent crimes should be held accountable for their actions and the harm they have done to others. They should not, however, be left without the possibility of rehabilitation. Allowing youth to be under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court system will decrease the exposure of youth to the adult system, a system whose mission is punishment rather than rehabilitation.

Maryland should be a leader in advocating that all children are capable of, and worthy of, redemption and deserve an opportunity for a second chance, regardless of their race, socio-economic background, or the crime of which they have been accused.

A developmentally informed system is also fair and works to ensure that all youth receive fair and equal treatment. This bill will assist the State of Maryland in addressing racial and ethnic

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disparities found in the juvenile justice system. Data in Maryland shows that youth of color are disproportionately impacted at each decision point in the juvenile justice system. The Data Resource Guide 2023 for the Department of Juvenile Services indicates that of the total complaints received by DJS in 2023 84.4% were youth of color. In addition, over 90% of youth charged in adult court in Maryland are people of color—81% are Black. This bill will help increase the opportunity for fair treatment for youth of color as they move through the court system.

MAYSB believes that following a developmental informed approach to juvenile justice is important and allows youth the opportunity to be held accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources to develop and be rehabilitated. At its core this model recognizes that the thinking and maturity of juveniles is not equal to that of adults and works to offer them opportunities to change and learn from their mistakes.

We ask you to support this bill with the requested amendment.

Respectfully Submitted:

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