

January 31, 2025

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for Senate Bill 422 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

On behalf of Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Bill 422 (SB0422), which proposes altering the jurisdiction of the juvenile court by repealing provisions that currently exclude certain offenses from its purview. This legislative change ensures that more juvenile cases are adjudicated within the juvenile justice system rather than being automatically transferred to adult courts. Such a reform is crucial for ensuring fairness and rehabilitation for young offenders, particularly Latino youth, who are disproportionately impacted by the current system.

Latino youth are incarcerated at an alarming rate compared to their peers. According to the Sentencing Project, Latino juveniles are 65% more likely than their white counterparts to be tried as adults. When minors are funneled into the adult criminal justice system, they face significantly harsher conditions, increased exposure to violence, and a higher likelihood of reoffending upon release. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that youth transferred to adult courts are approximately 34% more likely to be re-arrested for violent or other crimes than those retained in the juvenile system. The adult system is punitive rather than rehabilitative, failing to provide the necessary resources for these young individuals to reintegrate into society successfully.

Neuroscientific research confirms that the prefrontal cortex, responsible for impulse control and decision-making, does not fully develop until the mid-20s. This scientific understanding reinforces the need for age-appropriate sentencing and rehabilitative approaches. The juvenile justice system is uniquely designed to address the needs of young offenders through counseling, education, vocational training, and restorative justice practices that lower recidivism rates. The National Institute of Justice reports that juveniles who receive rehabilitative services are 43% less likely to reoffend. Keeping youth within the juvenile system not only enhances their prospects for rehabilitation but also strengthens public safety by reducing future criminal behavior.

Maryland has an opportunity to be a leader in juvenile justice reform. SB 422 aligns with national best practices that prioritize rehabilitation over punitive measures. By expanding the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, Maryland can address systemic disparities, lower recidivism rates, and provide young people with the support they need to build a stable and productive future.

We respectfully urge the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report on SB0422. Passing this legislation will reaffirm Maryland's commitment to a fair and effective justice system that recognizes the unique needs and potential of its young people.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

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