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January 31, 2025

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair

Senator William C. Smith, Jr. Chair

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Room 101

House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

RE: SB0422 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction

Position: SUPPORT with Modifications

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists throughout the state, asks the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to report FAVORABLY on SB0422, with some modifications.

The adolescent brain is not capable of the same level of rational thought as the adult brain; adjudicating children and adolescents in an adult judicial system places them in a process that was neither built to accommodate their needs nor suited to prevent them from committing further crimes. Juveniles processed in the adult criminal system have significantly higher rates of recidivism than those processed in the juvenile system, with some estimates finding the rates over 80%. Further auto-charge is used disproportionately in the African-American population, with 80% of juvenile cases being auto-charged being those of African-American youth despite those youth representing only 30% of the state population.

If the goal of our judicial system is to decrease crime, then it is clear that processing youth in the adult criminal system is not the path to reach that goal. Some might express concern that extremely violent youth who have not been able to be served in the juvenile system will not be able to be served should this law be enacted, but this law will only serve to remove the automaticity of the process. Youth who fail services in the juvenile system will still be able to be waived to the adult system should the need arise. We support this bill and would like to see it expand to stopping auto-charge completely, as the results of auto-charge are completely negative with no positive outcomes.

Thank you for considering our comments on SB0422. If we can be of any further assistance as the Judicial Proceedings Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Wolf at [mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com).

Respectfully submitted,

*David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.*

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President

*Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.*

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Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Richard Bloch, Esq., Counsel for Maryland Psychological Association  
Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs