



**Senate Bill 422: : Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2025**

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Choice Program at UMBC is in support of Senate Bill 422 *with amendments*. Automatic charging children as adults is a misguided practice that should be abolished entirely. SB 422 eliminates automatic charging for some children [aged 14 and 15,] and reduces the list of charges for 16 and 17 year olds. We respectfully suggest amendments that would end automatic charging for all offenses and for all children 17 and younger. This amendment simply changes where youth's cases start, and would still allow cases to be waived up to adult court after judicial review.

As a mentoring program, we have served more than 27,000 Maryland youth who are systems-involved since 1988. Presently, Choice works with young people and their families in Baltimore City as well as Baltimore, Howard, Prince George's, and Montgomery Counties; we recently expanded to Harford and Anne Arundel Counties. Choice serves as an alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline. Our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and Latine young people who are ensnared in the youth legal system. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employs strengths-based approaches focused on positive youth development. We hold high expectations for youth and parents as well as high levels of support. Our youth remind us that they should not be defined by their worst mistake. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic level.

For more than a century in the United States, we have recognized that children are categorically different from adults. We are convinced by the overwhelming evidence that youth and communities are better served when children are removed from the adult legal system. Heartbreaking research indicates that when children are in the adult criminal legal system, they are at far greater physical, emotional, and psychological risks. They are less likely to receive rehabilitative services and more likely kept in solitary confinement as a protective custody measure. Further, they are not guaranteed

school while in adult jail. More than 90% of kids charged in adult court in Maryland are people of color; 81% are Black. Black children are more likely to be prosecuted as adults and receive longer sentences than white children for similar offenses, in part because Black children are more likely to be seen and treated as adults.

We maintain community repair and well being depends on a vision of community safety that treats kids as kids. We call upon our elected officials to recognize that the youth who are convicted adults are young people—humans—who deserve supportive services. This session offers the chance to recognize the importance of rehabilitation for young people.

For these reasons, The Choice Program urges a favorable *with amendments* report for SB 422.

For more information contact:
Kelly Quinn, Ph.D., Managing Director