



Maryland Defenders Union
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Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2025
SB 422 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

To Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee,

We at the Maryland Defenders Union have the privilege of representing thousands of children in courts around the state, so we observe the system's inequities firsthand on a daily basis. More than 90 percent of the children charged as adults are children of color. Despite our zealous advocacy, these children often are convicted of adult offenses and languish in adult jails and prisons. The recent report from Human Rights for Kids shares many heartbreaking examples of children suffering in our adult facilities. As the report explains, Maryland ranks 4th in the country for the number of children convicted of adult offenses.

We have seen the devastating impact of our current law on thousands of children and their families, as well as the larger community. After serving their sentences, many of our clients return to the community more traumatized and unable to gain employment due to their adult convictions. Fortunately, Maryland offers a robust array of rehabilitative services to address trauma and other underlying causes of delinquent behavior through the juvenile court system. The juvenile system also provides children with the opportunity to obtain their high school diplomas and learn vocational skills to help them become productive members of our community.

As the great Marylander Frederick Douglass said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." We believe that this bill is a good start but ask for amendments to end automatic charging for all offenses and for all children under 17-years-old. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Maryland Defenders Union