

2/24/25
Claire Landers
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TESTIMONY ON HBI433- POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction

TO: Chair L. Clippinger, Vice-Chair S. Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Claire Landers, a resident in Baltimore County. I am a parent, a former social worker and educator, and have served as a reading volunteer in Baltimore City Schools. I submit this testimony to urge you to support of HBI433 and end “automatically charging” young people as adults in Maryland’s criminal justice system.

Collectively, we have all agreed that it makes sense that a young person should not be allowed to vote or independently enlist in the U.S. military until age 18. Before they turn 21, we are not willing to allow young people to legally purchase alcohol or cigarettes or rent a car. As adults, we can agree that children and teenagers lack the capacity to *consistently* act with good judgment and make reliably responsible decisions; they still need certain legal boundaries. Every parent, teacher, coach or adult who has cared about a young person has at some point been disappointed, frustrated and even shocked, by “good kids” and “smart teens” who have done something stupid, irresponsible and even harmful. And experts in brain development actually tell us we *shouldn’t be surprised*: neuroscience has established that the human brain simply does not reach full-maturity until an individual reaches the age of 25 (or even 26 for most males), especially in the amygdala, that area of the brain that regulates judgement and decision-making.

Why then, do we continue to allow kids as young as 12 and teens under 18 to be charged *automatically as adults* in our criminal code under 33 different charges?! It is unconscionable that Maryland persists in a practice that places us in line with states like Alabama and Florida.

In 2025, Maryland lawmakers should realign our state with reasonable, humane, 21st century charging policies that fully evaluate *all relevant circumstances* around any and every teenager under 18 before determining whether he or she will face the full force of the law by being charged with a crime as an “adult.”

Maryland’s racial disparities in auto-charging are a shameful reality: 80% of youth charged as adults here are Black; and while among those youth automatically charged as if they were adults, it is white youth who are vastly more likely to be reassigned into juvenile court. We can no longer let such a fundamentally flawed charging system with those results go unaddressed.

I urge you to support HBI433 and end auto-charging in Maryland..