



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
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February 26, 2025

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Chair Luke Clippinger
Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 1190 (HB1190) – Youth Accountability and Safety Act. This bill ensures that individuals who were children at the time of an offense cannot be convicted of first-degree felony murder unless they were the principal actor. Additionally, it allows those previously convicted under outdated legal standards to seek review of their cases, providing a fair opportunity for reassessment based on their actual involvement in the crime. **This bill is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

HB1190 is a critical step forward in advancing justice, particularly for African Americans who are disproportionately impacted by Maryland's criminal justice system. Black youth in Maryland are significantly overrepresented in serious criminal charges and sentencing disparities. A 2022 study from the Maryland Office of the Public Defender found that Black youth accounted for 70% of juvenile arrests despite comprising only 32% of the youth population. This bill directly addresses the unfair sentencing practices that have disproportionately harmed Black Marylanders.

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly believes that our criminal justice system must prioritize fairness, rehabilitation, and second chances. Maryland has one of the highest racial disparities in youth incarceration in the country, with Black youth being six times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers for similar offenses. Felony murder laws, which allow for convictions even when an individual did not directly commit the killing, have historically exacerbated these disparities.

HB1190 ensures that children are not unjustly convicted of first-degree felony murder if they were not the principal actor in the crime. The bill also offers a path for individuals previously sentenced under these outdated laws to seek review and possible resentencing, ensuring justice is applied fairly and retroactively.

A 2020 study by the Maryland Justice Project found that Black individuals are more likely to receive longer sentences for similar offenses compared to their white counterparts, exacerbating racial disparities in the state's prison system. HB1190 provides a needed path for reform, particularly for Black Marylanders who have been disproportionately impacted by these disparities. By preventing unjust felony murder convictions for youth and allowing for case reviews, the bill promotes a more equitable and rehabilitative approach to justice.

HB1190's provisions for conviction review offer a fairer legal process for those who have served significant time in prison for offenses they did not directly commit. Additionally, the bill's retroactive application ensures that those already incarcerated, including many Black individuals, can benefit from this opportunity for justice and redemption.

For Black communities in Maryland, the impact of this bill cannot be overstated. By providing an opportunity for individuals to have their cases reviewed, HB1190 fosters a more just and humane criminal justice system. The passage of this bill would represent a tangible step toward reversing the damaging effects of mass incarceration and ensuring that Black Marylanders who have shown rehabilitation and remorse are given a second chance at life outside of prison.

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports HB1190 and its efforts to reform Maryland's sentencing practices. This bill reflects our commitment to a criminal justice system that promotes fairness, accountability, and rehabilitation, while also recognizing the systemic racial disparities that continue to affect Black Marylanders. We urge your support for HB1190, as it offers a thoughtful and proactive approach to addressing the harms caused by overly punitive sentencing practices.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 1190.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland