

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
BILL#HB1433
JUVENILE COURT-JURISDICTION

February 21, 2025

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

My name is Anita Lampel and I live in Bethesda, MD, in D 16. I am submitting testimony in favor of this bill with amendments. I have a Ph.D. in psychology, ran a major Child and Adolescent Mental Health Program, provided assessments and testified in both juvenile and superior courts, and served on advisory panels on youth and adult justice in California. I then moved to Maryland where I discovered that children as young as fourteen can be tried and convicted in adult court. And that Maryland ranks at the bottom, next to Alabama, in the percent of Black youth who are incarcerated. Children's brains do not stop developing until the early '20s. Teens are more prone to impulsivity, more vulnerable to stressors that can literally change the brain's make-up. They are also resilient and can be assisted towards a path without crime. A child who is kept within a juvenile justice system and provided with appropriate services is much less likely to reoffend than a child with the same crime sent into the adult system. Isn't that what we want—less recidivism and better citizens? Juvenile Court Judges are in a much better position to know what services are available for the child in front of them than a judge in adult court. In fact, children who begin in adult court see their cases dismissed or are sent back to juvenile court 83% of the time! What a churn—a waste of money and attorney and court time. Start these children where they belong and let the capable judges make the decision.

I would like to see the bill amended to include all children, no matter what the nature of the crime. I acknowledge that specific crimes are frightening—car jacking, having a gun—but we need to consider the child behind that, assess that young person, and see how to turn them away from crime. If the Juvenile Court judge cannot see a route to that within the juvenile system, the judge can refer the child to adult court. Nothing in this law prevents that.

Ultimately, this legislation will help all Marylanders because it will reduce recidivism, enable youth to readjust their lives, and ease the concerns of the victims of crime.

Thank you,
Anita Lampel