



February 20, 2025

The Honorable Members of the Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, MD

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB1433

Dear Members of the Assembly,

I submit written testimony to you today on behalf of the Washington County NAACP Branch 7030B in support of HB1433, which proposes to alter the juvenile court's jurisdiction by repealing the provision that prevents the court from having jurisdiction over children alleged to have committed certain acts. This legislation represents a critical step towards reforming a legal system that has, for too long, treated children as adults, often with devastating consequences.

The policy of automatically charging children as adults is fundamentally flawed and disproportionately impacts African-American communities. Research indicates that this approach fails to enhance community safety and leads to poorer long-term outcomes for the children involved. Alarming, Maryland ranks second in the nation, following Alabama, in sending juveniles to adult court per capita. According to a 2024 report from Human Rights for Kids, Maryland ranks fourth in the number of individuals convicted as adults for offenses committed during their childhood,

Evidence shows that subjecting children to the adult criminal justice system places them at significantly more physical, emotional, and psychological risk. This practice is linked to higher rates of recidivism, as youth charged in adult courts are often denied access to essential rehabilitative services, making them more likely to re-offend. The current system exacerbates issues of violence and isolation among youth in the criminal justice system.

Data illustrates the racial bias inherent in our system, as over 81% of the youth charged in Maryland's adult courts are Black. A study conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice revealed disparities in how cases are processed, with white youth having their cases transferred down 94% of the time, compared to only 26% for youth of color.

While it is vital to uphold accountability for youth, we must also consider the lack of resources available to many communities and the profound impact of trauma on children. Jurisdiction must be determined on a case-by-case basis, allowing for a more compassionate and equitable approach.

Therefore, I urge you to support HB1433 to end the harmful practice of charging children as adults in Maryland. We should have a system that prioritizes rehabilitation, especially for our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Taj Smith", written over a horizontal line.

Taj Smith, President
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