



House Bill 873
Juvenile Law - Juvenile Court Jurisdiction - Theft of a Motor Vehicle
UNFAVORABLE

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Committee,

The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC) opposes HB878. MYJC represents a diverse array of local, state and national organizations; we aim to work towards a Maryland dedicated to preventing children and adolescents from becoming involved in the legal system, upholding the highest standards of care when youth do enter the legal system, and ensuring a platform for system-involved youth and their families to be heard. MYJC strives for a Maryland where no children are at risk of system involvement and, if they are involved with the legal system, they and their families receive every possible opportunity to define and live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives through restorative practices supported by our state and local communities.

This bill would expand the list of offenses for which 10-12 year olds could be brought to juvenile court to include car theft, if the 10, 11, or 12 year old had previously attended certain diversion programming. As the fiscal and policy note states, the analysis “assumes that the bill affects a negligible number of cases.” More specifically, in 2024, only 1.7% of DJS intake of 10-12 year olds was related to auto theft or unlawful use of a vehicle—this represents approximately 10 out of 580 children. HB873 would then only apply to any of the 10 children who previously attended a diversion program for certain offenses, which represents an even smaller number. **This bill is a solution in search of a problem.**

Numbers aside, this bill does not correspond with data and research. The Juvenile Justice Reform Act, which established a minimum age of 13 for non-crimes of violence, was the result of a two-year intensive process. In addition to the many hours the Juvenile Justice Reform Commission met before recommending a minimum age of 13, this committee has heard hours of briefings and testimony about how best to serve 10, 11, and 12 year olds. Last year, HB814 re-examined this specific issue of car thefts, and determined that services and utilizing the CINS process was a better approach than expanding court jurisdiction.

Lastly, the data and research tells us, what’s best for children, especially young children, is also what’s best for public safety. Services that help children understand and change their behavior lead to better long term outcomes for children and our communities. We request an unfavorable vote on HB878.