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The Reverend Stephen A. Tillett I, *Pastor*

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

In support of the efforts of The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC), I submit this testimony in support of HB 1433 with favorable amendments. I will not reiterate the assiduously detailed testimony with footnotes, et al. that you have already received. Instead, I would like to remind us of policy making (at the federal level, that also had reverberations at the state and local levels) in the mid 1990's. During the Clinton Administration, there was such a zeal to *punish* offenders for their crimes that perspective and proportionality was lost in the process. It led to the jailing of minority and poor citizens and historic rates. Many were jailed for relatively minor offenses or "third strike" offenses. It helped to create the wretched "Pre-school to Prison Pipeline" that *overincarcerated* members of the African American community for years. Some communities are *still* trying to recover from those injustices!

I understand the need to hold our youth offenders accountable for their crimes. However, I do not support incarcerating minors with adults. The other testimony and data you have received has detailed the myriad ways that is entirely unhelpful. It is purely punitive with no eye toward rehabilitating or reintegrating restored and productive individuals back into society. Unless a person is incarcerated with a life sentence, he/she will eventually be released. Do we want to release young people, many of whom were *already* traumatized, back into society after having experienced even more significant levels of trauma? Would any of us want to be *over-sentenced* for a youthful mistake? I think not!

Our younger offenders should be given every chance to receive counseling, therapy and education so they can emerge from prison more whole, repentant and prepared for life after incarceration. Jailing youthful offenders with adults will do nothing but create more angry, resentful and traumatized adults who will likely apply the lessons learned in negative ways when they're back on the outside, with us, and ultimately end up recidivating.

Please don't repeat the same mistakes we have made in the past. Show the same level of compassion and forward-thinking you would like applied to someone *you* care about. These people could be one of your neighbors or relatives who made some mistakes in their youth. They do not deserve to be sentenced to an even more damaging life of hell and abuse from which they may never recover. Please support HB 1433.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Andrew Tillett
Pastor