

HOUSE BILL 952

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POSITION: FAVORABLE FOR HB 952

February 24, 2025

My name is Alison Healey. I am the State's Attorney for Harford County and a board member of the Maryland State's Attorney's Association (hereinafter MSAA). I am here today to offer my support for House Bill 952, as supported by MSAA.

The intent of the juvenile sex offender registry is to provide effective notification and communication regarding sex offenses committed by juveniles in an effort to identify individuals who could be a risk to the safety of other individuals, especially other children. Our children are our most vulnerable citizens, and they deserve the maximum protection that we can provide to them under the law. For that reason, amendments to the juvenile sex offender registry statute are required to protect the many, many children in our schools.

Currently, there are serious sexual offenses that do not qualify a juvenile offender to have to register on the sex offender registry. Meaning, these are sex offenses that are serious enough to require registration for an adult but not a juvenile. This should not be the case as registration should be based on the offense, not the age. If we would want to know if an adult committed this type of offense, the same should be true of a juvenile, who is likely to have greater contact with other children.. In addition, some of the offenses which do not appear on the list of crimes related to the juvenile sex offender registry are just as serious as those which do appear. For example, First Degree Rape appears in the statute, but Attempted First Degree Rape does not. Just because an offender fails to fully complete penetration or the sexual act he/she is attempting does not make the crime any less serious, dangerous, or most importantly, less traumatic to the victim. These additional crimes must be added to identify those offenders that are a danger to other children.

Currently, the juvenile sex offender registry is only accessible by law enforcement. It is essential for the registry to be available to our school superintendents or their designees, as they must be aware of identified sex offenders for the protection of other students who could potentially end up in classrooms settings with those offenders without the amendments that H.B. 952 offers.

In addition, the statute limits the registration on the list to while the juvenile is under the jurisdiction of the Court. We know that with more services and resources needed for our Department of Juvenile Services, we see more juvenile offenders released from probation before they have been fully rehabilitated. Currently, once a juvenile is released from probation and the jurisdiction of the Court, he/she would also be removed from the registry. Just this year, a juvenile offender who committed a second-degree rape and a separate 4th degree sex offense on children who were not even old enough to be in school yet was taken off probation after just a year at a hearing where everyone at the hearing, including the respondent's family, indicated that he was still very much in need of rehabilitative services. When this probation was terminated, he no longer was subject to the jurisdiction of the court and thus, was removed from the registry despite a clear record that he still presented a danger to public safety. Because he was able to be removed from the registry, he was able to reenroll in school, which presented an extreme risk to the students in that school. Therefore, to address situations such as these, H.B. 952 would require that the offender remain on the registry until they are 18, or until the jurisdiction of the Court ends, whichever is later. This update ensures further protection to all students.

H.B. 952 is incredibly important, and it is a disservice to the hundreds of thousands of students to ignore their safety by not making these changes. The overall safety of the vast majority of children and students must outweigh any concerns related to updating the list and extending the registration period for the list. Therefore, I implore you, as you deliberate on this bill, to ask yourself - would I be willing to have my young child in the same classroom with the juvenile who committed the crimes I shared earlier? Would that concern me or would it not?

In closing, this bill is a necessary notification and communication bill that aims to provide safety for all students. The schools need to have all relevant information to make appropriate decisions for the safety of all the children we entrust into their care – all of our children must be safe, and House Bill 952 helps to ensure that.

For these reasons, **I respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 952.**