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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
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**Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson**

**SB0737: Juvenile Law – Probation and Treatment Services – Required Disposition (Parental Accountability Act)**

Good afternoon, Chair Senator William C. Smith, and Vice Chairman Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, and the esteemed member of the Judicial Proceedings Committee.

SB0737 strengthens accountability and rehabilitation within Maryland's juvenile justice system by ensuring that repeated serious delinquent behavior is met with thoughtful intervention and meaningful family engagement. This bill reinforces the simple principle that early, coordinated intervention is essential to protecting both the child's future and the safety of our communities.

This bill requires the juvenile court to place a child on probation unless secure confinement is ordered by a judge. If the court has determined that the child has more than once committed a delinquent act that would constitute a crime equivalent to an adult, used a firearm in the commission of a crime or has been found more than once to be a child in need of supervision, that's where this bill is powerful instrument in providing a restorative approach for our children and families of Maryland.

Importantly, the bill requires that this probation includes the adoption of a treatment service plan. That plan must outline specific supervision levels, goals for the child and family, services to be provided, and clear timelines for progress. It also requires the participation of the child's parent, guardian, or custodian in rehabilitative services that are in the best interest of the child and the family.

This legislation recognizes that lasting behavioral change cannot occur without family involvement. If a parent, guardian, or custodian does not participate in a court-ordered treatment service plan, the court is required to order their participation. This ensures accountability at every level while reinforcing that rehabilitation is a shared responsibility. The bill as well strengthens oversight by requiring timely implementation of treatment service plans and written certification to the court. If implementation does not occur within the required timeframe, the court must schedule a disposition review hearing. This guarantees that court-ordered services are not merely recommended but actively delivered.

SB0737 does not seek to punish. It seeks to intervene earlier, intervene consistently, and intervene effectively. By combining probation, structured treatment plans, and parental accountability, the bill helps create a clear pathway toward rehabilitation while maintaining public safety for our children, parents and communities.

Thus, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB0737 and thank you for your consideration.