



**Testimony before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2026**

**Senate Bill 296 - Juveniles - Detention and Confinement - Limitations on
Juvenile Contact With Incarcerated Adults**

SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 296 - Juveniles - Detention and Confinement - Limitations on Juvenile Contact With Incarcerated Adults.

We oppose the practice of housing or transporting juveniles alongside adult offenders. Research consistently confirms that youth placed in adult correctional environments experience significantly worse outcomes related to safety, mental health, rehabilitation, and long-term public safety. Maryland data, national justice statistics, and child development research collectively show that youth require developmentally appropriate systems designed to rehabilitate rather than punish.

Statistical Evidence

There is increased risk of physical harm, abuse, and suicide. Juveniles placed in adult facilities face significantly higher safety risks.

- Juveniles incarcerated in adult prisons are **36 times more likely to die by suicide** than those placed in juvenile facilities.
- Youth who were detained in adult facilities have approximately a **70% higher probability of experiencing violent victimization later in adulthood** compared to youth who never entered the justice system.
- National research highlights persistent concerns about whether adult prisons can adequately protect youth from **physical, sexual, and psychological abuse**, identifying safety as a primary institutional concern.

From a child welfare perspective, placing minors in environments where they are substantially more vulnerable to harm violates core protective mandates embedded in social work and child protection ethics.

It also puts them at risk for higher recidivism and worse public safety outcomes. More specifically, it increases:

- Youth prosecuted and treated as adults are **34% more likely to commit future felony offenses** compared to those kept in the juvenile system.

(over)



- Within three years of release, approximately **55% of justice-involved youth are rearrested or reconvicted**, indicating the need for rehabilitative interventions rather than punitive placement.
- Evidence-based family and community treatment models reduce recidivism by **25% to over 50%**, demonstrating that rehabilitative approaches produce stronger public safety outcomes than adult incarceration.

This evidence suggests that placing juveniles in adult environments increases long-term criminal behavior rather than reducing it. Social work is grounded in the understanding of adolescent development and trauma exposure.

Yet, Maryland continues to house or process youth within adult systems at concerning levels. Maryland's detention rate for youth in adult facilities reached **119.5 per 100,000 children**, which is more than six times higher than federal standards. The number of Maryland youth charged as adults increased by **12% between 2015 and 2023**, despite an overall decrease in juvenile referrals. These findings demonstrate inefficiency, increased harm, and wasted public resources.

Social Workers focus on what is in the best interest of the child, apply trauma-informed practices and prefer rehabilitation over punishment. We ask that the state of Maryland does not pass this law, so we can move in the direction of protecting our youth, protecting public safety and saving taxpayer dollars.

We urge you to vote YES on SB 296.

Respectfully,

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD