



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

February 4, 2026

SB 296

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

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 296. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 296 would allow prohibit all youth held in detention from being housed with adult inmates in all circumstances. This legislation requires complete sight and sound separation and removes capacity exceptions.

In 2015, this legislative body passed and unanimously overrode a gubernatorial veto on Senate Bill 172 which prohibited youth from being held with adult inmates, but for in very limited circumstances, such as lack of space, transport or, at times, being charged as an adult. This practice is also prohibited federally. However, this still happens in Maryland. Moreover, where separation is possible, youth are at risk of being placed to the detriment of their health in solitary confinement isolation. This practice must end with Senate Bill 296 once and for all.

Aside from the fact that youth placed in adult jails are more likely to be repeat offenders or recidivate, they are subject to violence, sexual assault and possibly gang initiation. Youth placed in adult jails are 36 times more likely to commit suicide than those held in youth facilities and 19 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. Additionally, although youth inmates only make up less than one percent of the jail population, they make up twenty-one percent of the total victim pool of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that "society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions. Placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution. In many instances, such terrible behavior points to our own negligence in raising children with a respect for life, providing a nurturing and loving

environment, or addressing serious mental or emotional illnesses.” (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, USCCB, 2000)

Placing youth in adult jails, rather than the more nurturing, rehabilitative venue of juvenile detention facilities, poses several developmental issues. For example, in fiscal 2024, Maryland youth spent 90 to 180 days in adult jails before being transferred to juvenile court, resulting in significant setbacks in their education. Considering that some 87% of youth held in adult jails have their cases dismissed entirely or remanded to the juvenile system, mixing youth and adult populations is overwhelmingly unwarranted.

Senate Bill 296 would alleviate the aforementioned exposure to violence, health and personal dignities and provide incarcerated youth the access to educational opportunities afforded by the juvenile system. It is time for Maryland to end this practice for good. Thus, we urge your support and favorable report of Senate Bill 296.