



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith Jr., Chair and
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 4, 2026

RE: **SB 323 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)**

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **OPPOSE SB 323**. This bill would significantly alter Maryland's existing juvenile justice framework by expanding juvenile court jurisdiction and eliminating current statutory provisions that allow certain serious and violent offenses to be charged initially in adult criminal courts.

While police chiefs and sheriffs support a juvenile justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation whenever appropriate, current law already provides a balanced and effective process. The existing framework preserves judicial discretion and allows for careful, case-by-case evaluation of when a juvenile case should remain in juvenile court or be heard in adult court. This process ensures that decisions are informed by the severity of the offense, the youth's prior history, and the need to protect public safety.

MCPA and MSA are concerned that the changes proposed in SB 323 would limit the ability of the justice system to respond appropriately to the most violent juvenile offenders and could negatively impact public safety. The current statutory structure includes important safeguards that allow cases involving serious violence, weapons, or repeated dangerous behavior to be heard in adult court when warranted, while still permitting transfer back to juvenile court when appropriate. Maintaining this process helps ensure accountability, protects communities, and preserves public confidence in the justice system.

MCPA and MSA have also heard numerous times that placements are not sufficient at DJS facilities to house juveniles who may need those types of services. If true, the requirements in SB 323 have the potential to further exacerbate these circumstances. A lack of adequate facility space could potentially have negative, unintended consequences on the youth and affect the provision of services by DJS.

Understanding the importance of this issue, MCPA and MSA stand ready to work with the Committee and stakeholders to strike the correct balance between assisting juveniles and protecting communities and public safety.

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