

Date of Hearing: February 12, 2026
Shelley J. Winkler
Washington Grove, MD 20880

TESTIMONY ON HB0409 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

TO: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Shelley J. Winkler

My name is Shelley Winkler. I am a resident of the Town of Washington Grove, Maryland. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0409, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).

I have lived in this area for nearly three decades. During that time I have volunteered extensively for my community, and also for the public elementary, middle and high schools my children attended. Most of the public schools my children attended were Title I schools, and I had a cherished opportunity to get to know youth from various backgrounds with varying levels of home/community support. Every single one of these children had so much positive energy to offer our community. There were times, though, that the lack of family support, or worse difficulties faced by the parents of some of these students, particularly by the time these youth were in high school, began to affect the ability of these students to put their full positive energy into school or extracurricular activities. It was painfully apparent that some of these children did the best they could despite the issues they were dealing with at home, but also that they were dealing with so much that school could not always be their priority.

A niece of mine has spent some years working with imprisoned, or previously imprisoned, youth in Massachusetts. She has shared their first person accounts of some of their stories on film. I would be happy to provide a link and password to anyone interested. Listening to these youth firsthand, one only can begin to understand the various traumas experienced in their short years — from having parents unable to guide them, to living in neighborhoods where committing crimes is part of the youth culture almost by necessity, to needing to fend for themselves just to get to school or home or to obtain food, and on. Every single one of these youth were endearing, despite all of their hardships, and it was clear that what they needed was not punishment but support.

Support of this Bill and ending the practice of automatically charging children as adults in Maryland courts is a critical step to providing justice for all.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0409.