

February 12, 2026
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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: David M. Friedman

My name is David Friedman. I am a resident of Colesville/Cloverly in District 14. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0409, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).

I am an active member of Oseh Shalom, a Jewish Reconstructionist congregation located in Laurel, MD. Jewish tradition and values have long recognized the differing capacities of children and adults. While Maryland has made progress on youth justice issues over the last few years, the practice of automatically charging kids as adults urgently needs to change as well, since it ignores definitive research that adolescent brains are rapidly developing and have yet to reach full maturity. Services and treatment in juvenile facilities are evidence-based and preventative.

Studies indicate that automatically charging kids as young as 14 as adults also leads to higher recidivism, as well as subjecting them to increased isolation and physical and sexual violence. It is also inefficient and damaging as 85% of kids in Maryland charged as adults are eventually dismissed or sent back to juvenile court and time spent in the adult system delays getting critical rehabilitative services. Limiting automatic charging of juveniles as adults would also significantly reduce the criminalization and incarceration of Black youth as 81% of kids charged in adult courts in Maryland are Black. I feel strongly that it is well past time for Maryland to join the other 26 states that have passed laws to limit pathways for juveniles into adult courts and end Maryland's status as the state that sends more young people to adult court based on offense type than any other state per capita except Alabama.

HB0409 makes significant progress by eliminating automatic charging for children aged 14 and 15, and reducing the list of charges for 16 and 17 year olds. Although the recent recommendation from a workgroup of Maryland's [Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices](#) calls for a system where *all* cases begin in juvenile court with discretion to waive youth to adult court when warranted, I believe this bill goes a good distance toward meeting that recommendation. **Thus, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0409.**