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Testimony On Bill HB0409- Position Favorable
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

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

FROM: Devin Krol

My name is Devin Krol, I am a resident in Stevenson, District 11. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0409, Juvenile Court- Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act). I've lived in Baltimore my entire life, work in childcare, and attended schools throughout Maryland. I am also the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, David and Rose Krol, who settled in Baltimore City and then the county when they arrived as refugees. My family background and Jewish roots gave me a deep sense of equity and civil action, as stated "justice, justice you shall pursue". This has led me to working towards youth justice, protecting children- some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Maryland has made strides in recent years in regards to youth justice issues but the racist practice of Autocharge remains in effect. At this time, the law requires that children as young as 14 are automatically charged and prosecuted in adult court for 33 different offenses. This practice disproportionately affects Black youth, as they are targeted by police and the justice system; of the total number of children sent into the adult court system, 81% are Black. In Maryland, of the total amount of children automatically charged as adults 87% of them are waived back into the juvenile system. But the time spent in the adult system can cause severe damage, especially with the lack of necessary services.

Automatically charging children as adults completely ignores the definitive research that adolescent brains are rapidly developing and have yet to reach maturity. This practice leads to higher rates of recidivism and puts children in danger. Children who are held in adult facilities are at a greater risk of sexual assault and violence. The Campaign for Youth Justice writes, "According to research by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, youth under the age of 18 represented 21% of all substantiated victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence." By ending autocharge, the amount of sexual and violent crime committed against these juveniles would be reduced significantly.

We, as a Maryland community, must stand together to protect children. The Bill HB0409 would help move Maryland towards a more just and equitable future.

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