



Testimony in Support of House Bill 409 Youth Charging Reform Act

Committee Name: Judiciary

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Submitted by: Treveric Speaks, Leadership Development Organizer, Out For Justice

Thank you Chair Barlett, Vice Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Treveric Speaks, and I am here today to offer testimony in strong support of HB 409. I strongly oppose the practice of automatically charging youth as adults in the state of Maryland.

I come before you not just as an advocate, but as someone who lived through this experience firsthand. At the age of 16, I was tried as an adult. I was still a child—emotionally, mentally, and developmentally—yet I was forced into an adult legal system that was never designed to protect or rehabilitate youth.

In Maryland, the majority of youth who are initially charged as adults are eventually sent back to juvenile court. This reality alone shows that the system recognizes that many of these young people should never have been charged as adults in the first place. However, by the time that correction is made, the damage has already been done.

Being placed in adult court and adult facilities causes serious and lasting trauma. Adult prisons are not built for children. They expose youth to fear, violence, and psychological harm that stays with them long after their case ends. No one truly understands the weight of that trauma unless they have lived it. I did—and it follows you into adulthood, impacting education, employment, mental health, and the ability to rebuild your life. Children deserve rehabilitation, guidance, and support—not adult punishment. Automatically charging youth as adults does not improve public safety. It only increases harm, deepens trauma, and makes successful reentry more difficult.

Children are our responsibility. As lawmakers and as a society, we have a duty to protect them, even when they make mistakes. I respectfully urge this body to end the practice of automatically charging youth as adults and to keep young people in youth-centered systems that focus on accountability, rehabilitation, and growth.

If we truly believe in justice, second chances, and the future of our children, then we must stop treating children like adults in our legal system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.