

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HB 409 Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Lois Hybl

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As an individual representative of my church to BRIDGE Maryland, I support HB 409 as a step forward in reducing the number of juveniles automatically sent to adult court. It will eliminate automatic charging for children aged 14 and 15 and reduce the number of auto-charging offenses that apply to 16- and 17-year-olds. It leaves the most serious offenses, such as first-degree murder, assault, and rape, as being automatically subject to adult court jurisdiction. It proposes to start about 75% of cases currently subject to automatic treatment in juvenile court, where a judge can weigh the child's circumstances and care first, rather than subjecting them to a punitive adult system.

The juvenile justice system in the United States was intended to focus on treatment and rehabilitation rather than punishment. Starting youth cases in the youth justice system guards against the high rates of recidivism associated with being subject to the adult criminal justice system. It is also more expensive to charge youth as adults. Some of these funds should be redirected toward proven violence prevention and rehabilitation efforts.

In the long run, focusing on effective treatment and rehabilitation for youth will contribute to future public safety.

Please give a favorable report to HB 409

Lois Hybl, 707 Maiden Choice LN, Apt. 8216, Catonsville, MD 21228.