



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 409 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction*
(*Youth Charging Reform Act*)
Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2026**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, equity, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our nonprofits that serve the most vulnerable on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 409 which alters the jurisdiction of the juvenile court by repealing provisions specifying that the juvenile court does not have jurisdiction over a child alleged to have committed any crime punishable by life imprisonment. HB 409 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. Under current Maryland law, 14- and 15-year-olds, and most 16- and 17-year-olds are required to be automatically prosecuted in adult court.

Maryland sends more young people to adult courts, per capita, than any other state except Alabama. Research shows that automatically prosecuting children as adults does not lower recidivism or enhance community safety. Young people should not be automatically sent to adult court, but rather to juvenile court, unless they are charged with a heinous crime. Today, there are 33 offenses that automatically send Maryland children to an adult detention center upon arrest. 85% of them ultimately return to juvenile court or have their cases dismissed. In the meantime, many spend up to 180 days housed in adult jail while awaiting trial. In this setting, they are vulnerable to adult criminals and are not eligible to receive educational support or behavioral health services that would be provided in the juvenile system.

At the JCRC, our Jewish values teach us to pursue equity and justice. Not only is it unjust for children not charged with a violent crime to automatically be sent to adult court; it is also highly problematic in that 81% of juveniles charged in adult courts in Maryland are Black. It is time for Maryland to fall in line with the rest of the nation. We believe children should be treated as children and given the support they need in the juvenile justice system, with access to rehabilitative services and not punitive action of the adult system. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for House Bill 409.