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Testimony from:
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Testimony in Support of House Bill 409, the "Youth Charging Reform Act"

February 12, 2026

House Judiciary Committee

Chairwoman Bartlett and members of the committee,

My name is Logan Seacrest, and I am a fellow of Criminal Justice and Civil Liberties at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government. This is why HB 409, the Youth Charging Reform Act, is of special interest to us.

Maryland remains an outlier in how it treats young people in the legal system. In 2025, Maryland automatically charged more than 1,000 children as if they were adults, without judge or prosecutor input, more than any other state except for Alabama.[1] Most of these cases are eventually transferred back to juvenile court or dismissed, never resulting in an adult criminal conviction.[2]

The Youth Charging Reform Act promotes limited, effective government by changing this inefficient and expensive process. This bill will reduce the number of cases that start in the wrong court, preventing the waste of judicial resources on transfer hearings and waivers, saving the state millions of dollars per year.[3]

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[1] Elizabeth Calvin and Emily Virgin. "Maryland Should Do Better by Children Accused of Crimes," March 12, 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/12/maryland-should-do-better-children-accused-crimes.
[2] Juvenile Justice Reform Council, "Final Report," Maryland Department of Legislative Services, January 2021. http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnJuvRefCncl/JJRC-Final-Report.pdf.
[3] Maryland Department of Legislative Services, "Fiscal and Policy Note: House Bill 422, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction," Maryland General Assembly, 2025. https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2026RS/fnotes/bil_0009/hb0409.pdf

Importantly, this measure does not end or prohibit the prosecution of youth as adults. However, it does make those decisions more deliberate, giving prosecutors and judges more discretion over serious cases, not less.

This legislation still requires cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds charged with any of 12 serious offenses—including murder and carjacking—to begin in adult court. Prosecutors also retain the ability to petition for the transfer of other serious cases to adult court. Similarly, judges will continue to have the discretion to decide who is detained or released. The bill simply ensures that most youth cases begin where they should start: in a system designed to hold youth accountable while delivering age-appropriate rehabilitation services.

Maryland's current system of automatically charging youth as adults sets youth on a lifelong path of justice system involvement.[4] Children charged as adults have higher rates of recidivism and are more likely to commit violent crimes later in life, compared to comparable individuals in the juvenile system.[5] Furthermore, exposing young people to adult jails increases the risk of physical violence, sexual assault, and isolation, factors that often contribute to future criminality.[6]

Youth charged with serious offenses need to be held accountable. However, accountability should not come at the expense of effective public safety or fiscal responsibility. By passing the Youth Charging Reform Act, Maryland will improve long-term outcomes for Maryland's youth, reduce an extravagant misuse of government resources, and bring the state in alignment with national best practices and the latest scientific evidence on juvenile justice.

I respectfully ask that the committee issue a favorable report for HB 409.

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[4] Nicole Scialabba, "Should Juveniles Be Charged as Adults in the Criminal Justice System?", American Bar Association, Oct. 3, 2016. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2016/should-juveniles-be-charged-as-adults.

[5] Robert Hahn et al. "Effects on Violence of Laws and Policies Facilitating the Transfer of Juveniles from the Juvenile Justice System to the Adult Justice System: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services." Center for Disease Control MMWR Recommendations and Reports, 56: RR-9, November 30, 2007, pp. 1-11, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5609.pdf;

[6] National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, "Report of the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission National PREA Resource Center, June, 2009, https://www.prearesourcecenter.org/resource/national-prison-rape-elimination-commission-report.