



**HB 409 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**February 12, 2026**  
**SUPPORT**

Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 409. This bill will adjust state law to remove automatic transfers for certain offenses. Qualifying cases would originate in the juvenile court instead of defaulting to adult court, while still leaving the opportunity for the prosecution to petition to elevate the case to adult courts.

The CASH Campaign of Maryland promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate income individuals and families in Baltimore and across Maryland. CASH accomplishes its mission through operating a portfolio of direct service programs, building organizational and field capacity, and leading policy and advocacy initiatives to strengthen family economic stability. CASH and its partners across the state achieve this by providing free tax preparation services through the IRS program 'VITA', offering free financial education and coaching, and engaging in policy research and advocacy. **Almost 4,000 of CASH's tax preparation clients earn less than \$10,000 annually. More than half earn less than \$20,000.**

Current law requires the defense counsel to petition the court to move the case back to juvenile courts after being automatically transferred. This disproportionately affects young people in low-income families who become justice involved. The Maryland Public Defender's Office has reported chronic staffing shortages and increasing caseloads, this limits the attorneys' capacity to file optional motions, like those needed to pursue individualized motions to move jurisdiction from adult court to juvenile.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, 83.3% of the young people who were charged as an adult were Black, DJS states "racial and ethnic disparities in youth justice reveals that youth of color are twice as likely to be detained and committed to custody as white youth in Maryland".<sup>2</sup> Therefore, reliance on the defense's capacity functions as a barrier for poor youth and disproportionately harms Black juveniles, transforming procedural discretion into a mechanism that reinforces racial and economic inequality.

Finally, research regarding adolescent development in juveniles who are justice-involved shows that rehabilitation is far more feasible because youth differ from adults in cognition and responsiveness to interventions.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, education is affected when a student faces charges when they are removed from school or subjected to further discipline. If confined, upon reentry, they face barriers of reenrollment, loss of academic credit, and placement in alternative, inferior schools. This not only negatively affects their education, but future success in education and earning potential. HB 409 takes a meaningful step in removing structural barriers that undermine rehabilitation, educational attainment, and fair treatment for justice involved youth.

**Thus, we encourage you to return a favorable report for HB 409.**

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland public defender's office seeks more help. Maryland Matters.

<https://marylandmatters.org/2025/12/01/maryland-public-defenders-office-seeks-more-help/>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Juvenile Services. Research brief – Putting youth crime in Maryland in Context.

[https://djs.maryland.gov/Documents/MD-DJS-Juvenile-Crime-Data-Brief\\_20230912.pdf](https://djs.maryland.gov/Documents/MD-DJS-Juvenile-Crime-Data-Brief_20230912.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v4i0.20274>