



# LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3185 • 800-492-7122 Ext. 3185 • Black.Caucus@house.maryland.gov

## EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

### Chair

Delegate N. Scott Phillips, District 10

### 1st Vice Chair

Senator Shaneka Henson, District 30

### 2nd Vice Chair

Delegate Karen Toles, District 25

### Treasurer

Delegate Marlon Amprey, District 40

### Secretary

Delegate Jamila J. Woods, District 26

### Financial Secretary

Senator Arthur Ellis, District 28

### Chaplain

Delegate Jeffrie E. Long, Jr., District 27B

### Parliamentarian

Delegate Stephanie Smith, District 45

### Historian

Delegate Cheryl E. Pasteur, District 11A

### Chair Emerita

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins, District 20

### Executive Director

Ufuoma O. Agarin, J.D.

## MEMBERS

Senator Malcolm Augustine, District 47  
Senator Benjamin Brooks, District 10  
Senator Joanne C. Benson, District 24  
Senator Nick Charles, District 25  
Senator Kevin M. Harris, District 27  
Senator Antonio L. Hayes, District 40  
Senator Carl Jackson, District 8  
Senator Cory V. McCray, District 45  
Senator C. Anthony Muse, District 26  
Senator William C. Smith, Jr., District 20  
Senator Charles E. Sydnor III, Esq., District 44  
Senator Alonzo T. Washington, District 22  
Senator Mary L. Washington, District 43  
Senator Ron Watson, District 23  
Delegate Gabriel Acevero, District 39  
Delegate Jacqueline T. Addison, District 45  
Delegate Tiffany Alston, District 24  
Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, District 32  
Delegate Adrian Bonta, District 23  
Delegate Regina T. Boyce, District 43A  
Delegate Derrick Coley, District 24  
Delegate Frank M. Conaway, Jr., District 40  
Delegate Charlotte Crutchfield, District 19  
Delegate Debra M. Davis, District 28  
Delegate Diana M. Fennell, District 47A  
Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison, District 24  
Delegate Terri L. Hill, District 12  
Delegate Marvin E. Holmes, Jr., District 23  
Delegate Julian Ivey, District 47A  
Delegate Andre V. Johnson, Jr., District 34A  
Delegate Adrienne A. Jones, District 10  
Delegate Robbyn Lewis, District 46  
Delegate Ashanti Martinez, District 22  
Delegate Althea McCaskill, District 44B  
Delegate Bernice Mireku-North, District 14  
Delegate LaToya Nkongolo, District 31  
Delegate Darrell Odum, Sr., District 27A  
Delegate Edith J. Patterson, District 28  
Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, District 21  
Delegate Pamela E. Queen, District 14  
Delegate Kent Roberson, District 25  
Delegate Denise G. Roberts, District 25  
Delegate Mike Rogers, District 32  
Delegate Kim Ross, District 8  
Delegate Malcolm P. Ruff, District 41  
Delegate Gary Simmons, District 12B  
Delegate Sean A. Shinnett, District 41  
Delegate Deni Taveras, District 47B  
Delegate Kym Taylor, District 23  
Delegate Veronica Turner, District 26  
Delegate Melissa Wells, District 40  
Delegate Jennifer White Holland, District 10  
Delegate Nicole A. Williams, District 22  
Delegate C.T. Wilson, District 28  
Delegate Greg Wims, District 39  
Delegate Caylin Young, District 45

February 12, 2026

Chair J. Sandy Bartlett  
Judiciary Committee  
101 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committee,

**The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 409 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).** This bill introduces essential reforms to Maryland's juvenile justice system, ensuring that the rule preventing the juvenile court from dealing with cases involving children accused of crimes punishable by life imprisonment is removed. **House Bill 409 is a 2026 Legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

Black youth in Maryland are disproportionately charged and sentenced as adults, which represents how the system is failing, as children are not fully developed to be placed in adult prison. According to data from the Maryland Psychological Association, the adolescent brain is not functioning the same as an adult brain which is why children and adolescents in the judicial system are not built to accommodate their needs and should be prevented from experiencing adult imprisonment. These disparities contribute to higher rates of incarceration as disproportionately around 80 % of juvenile cases are auto charged being those of African American youth despite representing 30 % of the state population. The goal of the judicial system is to decrease crime, but processing children as adults will not make that difference.

HB 409 ensures that charging children as adults may also affect their development into becoming healthy adults. According to the Gault Center, prosecuting children as adults may interrupt their development, harm their identity development, and allow them to lose opportunities to thrive as adults. It has also been stated that prosecuting young individuals as adults can create challenges once they are released, as they may struggle to make an honest living both economically and socially.

Additionally, youth who have experienced adult court have faced high rates of trauma. The Gault Center also states that nearly 70% have experienced six or more adverse childhood experiences prior to their incarceration. Around 73% reported experiencing physical abuse, 40 % experience sexual abuse, and around 75 % experienced emotional abuse as a child. More cases within the juvenile system reduce the likelihood of. To promote transparency and accountability, House Bill 409 ensures that juvenile cases are handled with a focus on helping the youth. This approach not only benefits the affected youth

but also strengthens communities by addressing that the youth should be charged in juvenile court and not adult court, as they are still developing.

By addressing the disproportionate impact of the adult criminal justice system on Black youth, House Bill 409 advances principles of justice and equity while allowing Maryland to redirect resources toward rehabilitation and community support. The bill's provisions reflect the Caucus's commitment to addressing systemic disparities and advocating for reforms that uphold human rights within the criminal justice system.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports House Bill 409.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland