

**TESTIMONY on HB 409**  
**Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)**

**House Judiciary Committee**  
**February 12, 2026**

**FAVORABLE**

Submitted by: Magdalena Tsiongas, MPH

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I submit this testimony to express my **SUPPORT for House Bill 409**. I am the founder of the MD Second Look Coalition, which I started on behalf of my partner who has been serving a life without parole sentence since age 19.

I believe HB 409 is a vital step toward correcting Maryland's outdated "automatic charging" system because it will eliminate automatic charging for children aged 14 and 15 and reduce the number of auto-charging offenses that apply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.

One of the most concerning aspects of automatically charging youth as adults in Maryland is that it puts children in contact with adults in carceral facilities, exposing them to increased physical and sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Youth incarcerated in adult facilities are also a shocking 36 times more likely to die by suicide than if housed in a juvenile facility.<sup>2</sup> Federal law requires children to be held separately from adults when incarcerated (under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act), but Maryland continues to violate federal law. In fact, Maryland had 1,600 violations of the law in FY24, more than any other state in the country.<sup>3</sup>

My own loved one was incarcerated at 19 and describes his experience being incarcerated as a teenager and subjected to multiple strip searches, routine practice in adult facilities:

*Starting my incarceration at the age of 19, I was subjected to many forms of human violation, isolation, humiliation, and a constant threat of violence, traumas which have left me forever scarred. When I was alone, I broke down out of the frustration of just being degraded, humiliated, and violated. That experience (a particularly invasive strip search) was foul to my brain. As someone who has been sexually abused as a child, that opened up old wounds that I thought were closed. It's amazing how I'm supposed to be sent to prison to curb my violence, and here I am, met at the door with it.*

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<sup>1</sup> National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, "National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report," June 2009, <https://www.prearesourcecenter.org/sites/default/files/library/NPREC-Final-Report.PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> Neelum Arya, "Getting to Zero: A 50-State Study of Strategies to Remove Youth from Adult Jails" (UCLA School of Law, 2018), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LLSF8uBlrcqDaFW3ZKo\\_k3xpk\\_DTmltV/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LLSF8uBlrcqDaFW3ZKo_k3xpk_DTmltV/view).

<sup>3</sup> Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices, "Maryland's JJDP A Compliance Crisis: Children in Adult Detention," 2025, <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/Marylands-JJDP A-Compliance-Crisis-Children-in-Adult-Detention-COMMISSION-APPROVED-.docx.pdf>.

HB 409 is a compromise bill. 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 as an adult in juvenile court. While this bill is a start, all children deserve to be treated as children.

Thank you for your consideration and I request a favorable report for House Bill 409.