

Date of Hearing: February 12, 2026
Susan W. Tafler
Odenton, Maryland 21113

TESTIMONY ON HB409 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

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

My name is Susan Tafler. I am a resident of Odenton, District 21. I am submitting this testimony to the Judiciary Committee in support of HB409, the Youth Charging Reform Act. This important legislation seeks to address significant components of our state's unacceptable system of automatically charging kids as adults. Passing HB409 would allow more kids who are accused of crimes to receive support and rehabilitation, reducing violent crime and recidivism while treating them more fairly and humanely. It would also reduce the amount of time that these children wait for their cases to be heard and would prevent them from being incarcerated in adult jails. HB409 will simply change where juvenile cases start and would still allow cases to be waived up to adult court after judicial review

The Jewish values that I have grown up with have long recognized the differing capacities of children and adults. *Yetzer harah*, the "evil inclination," is seen as a drive toward pleasure that can be tempered by *yetzer hatov*, the "good inclination" or moral sense that leads to benefits toward oneself and society. The ability to "tame" the basic instincts, *yetzer harah*, with higher level reasoning, *yetzer hatov*, grows stronger as we mature, warranting different treatment of children and adults.

I taught high school biology for a good number of years, and I think I know what teenagers are like. In my classroom I certainly had my share of kids who were immature, impulsive, and disruptive and a few who have gotten themselves into trouble in the larger community. I could understand that adolescent brains are not adult brains! I did feel confident that given support and steady guidance those young troublemakers could eventually mature and settle down to turn into pretty good adults. I find it appalling that Maryland has been sending children as young as 14 to adult detention facilities. Autocharging especially harms Black youth, who are disproportionately targeted by police and our justice system. In fact, 81% of kids charged in adult court in Maryland are Black. Not only is this practice damaging to the children facing prosecution, it does not further the safety of the communities they live in. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB409, the Youth Charging Reform Act.**