
ROBERT G. CASSILLY
Harford County Executive



ROBERT S. McCORD
Director of Administration

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Opposition on HB 409 – “Juvenile Court Jurisdiction - (Youth Charging Reform Act)”

Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of Harford County to respectfully oppose House Bill 409.

Harford County strongly supports rehabilitation, intervention, and meaningful services for youth involved in the justice system. However, HB 409 goes too far by significantly expanding juvenile court jurisdiction to include serious offenses that currently warrant adult criminal court consideration. This shift raises serious concerns about public safety, accountability, and the ability of the juvenile system to address violent and high-risk behavior.

Current law appropriately recognizes that while juveniles deserve special consideration, there are limited circumstances where the severity of an offense requires access to the adult criminal justice system to ensure community safety and meaningful consequences. HB 409 removes important safeguards by eliminating automatic exclusions for certain serious offenses, regardless of the nature of the crime or the risk posed to the public.

Local governments, law enforcement agencies, and State’s Attorneys are already working within a carefully balanced framework that allows prosecutors and courts to evaluate youth cases individually and seek transfers when appropriate. HB 409 disrupts that balance and restricts discretion in a way that could lead to dangerous outcomes for victims, neighborhoods, and first responders. This bill removes oversight of the process of elected States Attorneys and substitutes bureaucratic discretion.

In addition, expanding juvenile court jurisdiction without a corresponding expansion of resources places significant strain on the juvenile justice system. The State will face increased operational and fiscal impacts, including detention capacity, supervision

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demands, treatment services, and court administration without any guarantee that the system is equipped to manage more serious and violent cases.

Public confidence in the justice system depends on a structure that protects youth while also ensuring accountability and community safety. HB 409 risks eroding that confidence by removing elected official oversight and critical distinctions between minor delinquency and serious criminal conduct.

For these reasons, Harford County respectfully urges the Committee to oppose HB 409. We believe meaningful juvenile justice reform must strike a careful balance. One that prioritizes rehabilitation without compromising public safety or undermining local law enforcement and prosecutorial judgment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert G. Cassilly