



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 626 Custodial Interrogation of Minors - Admissibility of Statements (Exonerated 5 Act). This important legislation advances fairness in the justice system, strengthens protections for minors during custodial interrogations, and promotes more reliable and equitable outcomes in criminal and juvenile proceedings.

House Bill 626 establishes a critical safeguard by creating a rebuttable presumption that statements made by minors during custodial interrogations are involuntary and inadmissible when law enforcement officers intentionally use false information to elicit those statements. Young people are uniquely vulnerable in high-pressure interrogation environments due to developmental, cognitive, and emotional factors that can make them more susceptible to coercion or manipulation. This bill recognizes those realities and ensures that the legal system takes appropriate precautions to protect children's constitutional rights.

This legislation is especially important for Black youth and other marginalized communities, who are disproportionately represented in juvenile and criminal justice systems and who have historically faced inequitable treatment during law enforcement interactions. False confessions and involuntary statements have contributed to wrongful convictions and long-lasting harm to individuals, families, and communities.

Additionally, the bill supports public confidence in the justice system by improving the reliability of evidence used in court proceedings. Ensuring that statements obtained from minors are voluntary and truthful protects the integrity of investigations while reducing the risk of wrongful convictions that undermine faith in law enforcement and judicial institutions. These protections also align Maryland with evolving national standards and research on youth development and trauma-informed justice practices.

Ultimately, **House Bill 626** reflects Maryland's commitment to a justice system that balances public safety with fairness and due process. Protecting minors from coercive interrogation tactics does not hinder law enforcement; rather, it strengthens the pursuit of justice by ensuring that convictions are based on reliable evidence and constitutional practices. By passing **House Bill 626**, Maryland takes a meaningful step toward safeguarding youth, promoting equity, and advancing a more just legal system.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland urges favorable consideration of **House Bill 626**.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland