



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair and
Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: April 2, 2026

RE: **SB 323 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction, Detention, and Confinement (Youth
Charging Reform Act)**

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **OPPOSE SB 323**. This bill would significantly alter Maryland's existing juvenile justice framework by expanding juvenile court jurisdiction and narrowing and restructuring existing statutory provisions that currently allow certain serious offenses to be charged initially in adult criminal courts.

While police chiefs and sheriffs support a juvenile justice system that prioritizes rehabilitation whenever appropriate, current law already provides a balanced and effective process. The existing framework provides a structured and balanced approach that includes both automatic charging provisions for the most serious offenses and judicial discretion through established transfer mechanisms. Together, these components preserve meaningful judicial oversight and allow for careful, case-by-case evaluation of whether a juvenile matter should remain in juvenile court or be heard in adult court. This process ensures that decisions are informed by the severity of the offense, the youth's prior history, and the need to protect public safety.

MCPA and MSA are concerned that the changes proposed in SB 323 would limit the ability of the justice system to respond appropriately to the most violent juvenile offenders and could negatively impact public safety. Although the bill includes provisions related to detention for certain older juveniles, these changes do not fully address concerns regarding the handling of the most serious offenses. The current statutory structure includes important safeguards that allow cases involving serious violence, weapons, or repeated dangerous behavior to be heard in adult court when warranted, while still permitting transfer back to juvenile court when appropriate. Maintaining this process helps ensure accountability, protects communities, and preserves public confidence in the justice system.

MCPA and MSA have also heard numerous times that placements are not sufficient at DJS facilities to house juveniles who may need those types of services. If true, the requirements in SB 323 have the potential to further exacerbate these circumstances. A lack of adequate facility space could potentially have negative, unintended consequences on the youth and affect the provision of services by DJS.

Finally, MCPA and MSA recognize the value of the reporting requirements included in SB 323. Collecting consistent data on the length of time youth spend in detention and other placements while awaiting key decisions will provide stakeholders with a clearer, more complete understanding of how the system is functioning in practice. This information will help inform thoughtful policy decisions, support effective resource allocation, and ensure that youth are receiving timely and appropriate services. MCPA and MSA appreciate the inclusion of these provisions and believe they can serve as a helpful tool for ongoing evaluation and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Understanding the importance of this issue, MCPA and MSA stand ready to work with the Committee and stakeholders to strike the correct balance between assisting juveniles and protecting communities and public safety.