

To: Committee Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: The Denney House Inc.

Re: SB494 Juveniles Convicted as Adults - Sentencing - Limitations and Reduction (Juvenile Restoration Act)

Date: February 17, 2021

Position: Support

The Denney House Inc. was founded to empower youth and their families in the state of Maryland to discover their unique purpose of life and equip them with the tools to unlock their full potential. We wholeheartedly believe in redemption and that no child should be sentenced to die in prison. As such, we provide this brief testimony, simply as a way to state our support on House Bill 409, the Juvenile Restoration Act.

In the 1990s, youth at the ages of 16, 17, and 18 were given a larger wave of tough-on-crime legislation. The sentencing restricted them to ever see the streets again until they were much older. But since then, advocates have turned the tide by championing research suggesting that juvenile offenders can be rehabilitated.

We do believe that children and adults should be held accountable for their actions, particularly criminal actions that harm others. However, the punishment of children should consider the biological and developmental limitations that differ children from adults. Children's punishment should acknowledge possibility for maturity, growth and remediation. Sentencing a child to die in prison, ignores the science of adolescent development. The Juvenile Restoration Act will bring Maryland in line with other states like Virginia, West Virginia, Arkansas, Nevada, and North Dakota by abolishing life without the possibility of parole for juveniles and providing for judicial review after 20 years to everyone who committed a crime as a child in Maryland.

We ask that you make SB494 a priority, voting it favorably and send the clear message that no child should die in prison.

Thank you,

Khalilah Denney
Founder & Executive Director