

**To: Maryland General Assembly, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**  
**From: Ongisa Ichile-Mckenzie- Director, Southern Marylanders for Racial Equality**  
**Re: SB 494- Juveniles Convicted as Adults**  
**Hearing Date: February 17, 2021**

**We submit this written testimony to request a favorable vote for SB 494. The fact that Maryland is the only state in our region to sentence youth to life imprisonment is appalling. We should be leaders who set the example for other states legislatively, but we are lagging behind in fundamental ways.**

**Our organization, Southern Marylanders for Racial Equality, is dedicated to racial equity in many aspects of life. In our region, which includes Charles, Calvert and St. Mary's counties, there is an obvious disparity in the justice system. Black children make up the vast majority of the arrests, charges, detentions, etc.- to the figure of 88% of the children we see funneled into the system. That is why we must take a stand and fix this grave issue.**

**As you likely will have heard by the end of today's hearing, juvenile brains aren't fully formed. It must follow, then, that they cannot be held for an entire lifetime for an act committed when they were children. The research also shows that after 15-20 years in prison, the return/recidivism rate for these prisoners is about 1%. That means that they can serve time, and then be safely reintegrated into society. They can contribute, instead of languishing in an expensive, exploitative prison facility.**

**Please make the ethically sound decision; a decision that has already been made in over 24 states, and all of the surrounding states in our region. Please vote favorable on SB 494.**

**Sincerely,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ongisa', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Ongisa Ichile-Mckenzie**  
**Director, Southern Marylanders for Racial Equality**