



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 494 (Senator West)
Juvenile Restoration Act
FAVORABLE**

February 17, 2021

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 494. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation as part of building a just future for our state and bringing Maryland in line with recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings and twenty-four other states and jurisdictions, including Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, which have passed legislation similar to the Juvenile Restoration Act.

Maryland's juvenile justice system is in need of significant reform in order to transition from a youth incarceration system to a justice system focused on setting up children and youth for successful reentry. According to [this 2020 Human Rights for Kids study](#), Maryland ranks in the bottom six and is categorized as one of the "worst human rights offenders," a classification designated for states that have "made little to no effort to protect the human rights of children in the justice system and is likely in violation of international human rights standards." In addition to this national study, a [recent story from Capital News Service](#) reports that in 2019, Black youth represented 77% of juvenile detention centers, white youth less than 18%, Latinx 6-7%. For context, census data shows that 41% of children in Maryland are white, while 31.6% are Black. Our juvenile justice system, like our criminal justice system has disproportionately incarcerated children of color.

Some jurisdictions in Maryland are working to address these issues. State's Attorney Aisha Braveboy is leading significant efforts in Prince George's County through the Youth Justice Reform Unit. But this kind of reform cannot be left up to individual jurisdictions, and State's Attorneys to address. The Juvenile Restoration Act is based on the beliefs that no child is irredeemable and no child should be locked away without the possibility of a second chance. Numerous studies have been written about the development of children and youth's brains in terms of decision making and impulse control. We know that it is unfair to hold children and youth to the same standards as adults. This legislation is an important step forward in making Maryland's juvenile justice system more just and protecting the rights of children. Strong Future Maryland urges the committee to vote favorably on SB494.

*John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair*

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