



NAACP

Maryland

STATE CONFERENCE

SB-494

**JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE
CHAIRMAN LUKE CLIPPINGER**

February 17, 2021

With the Juvenile Restoration Act (SB 494), Maryland currently has the opportunity to join the growing number of states who have banned the practice of sentencing children to die in prison and are committed to giving youth a second chance. Twenty-four states and jurisdictions, including our neighbors of Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, have enacted legislation abolishing life without the possibility of parole for youth sentenced as adults. Unfortunately, Maryland has not yet taken this important step.

Race cannot be ignored when discussing these sentences. With the implementation of the Juvenile Restoration Act, Maryland will begin to reform its practices. Nationwide, African Americans constitute 60 percent of the youth serving life without parole, according to Human Rights Watch, even though they make up just 13.1 percent of the country's population. Black youth are serving the sentences at a rate that is ten times higher than white youth. This doesn't mean that black youth commit 10 times as many serious crimes. Rather, studies have found that black youth receive harsher treatment than similarly situated white youths at every stage of the criminal justice system, from the point of arrest to sentencing. As it stands, Maryland has the unfortunate distinction of ranking first in the nation with the highest proportion of Black youth sentenced to life without parole. Of those that would be immediately eligible under HB 409, 87% are Black. Those numbers are startling, and we can not afford to delay addressing these disparities.

As our country began to reckon with racial injustice, we must pledge to reform our criminal justice system. At the Maryland State Conference NAACP, we advocate for and advance a better public safety system that reduces the reliance on prisons as means of solving social problems. We reject the "tough on crime" rhetoric that fails to address the real cause of malfeasance, as well as fail to take into account the systemic injustices that have widely been unaddressed.

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Should you need additional information regarding our support on this issue, please contact Willie Flowers at mscpresident20@gmail.com.