

**TESTIMONY in favor of SB 853**  
**Juvenile Law - Juvenile Justice Reform**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee  
**FROM:** Iman Freeman on behalf of Baltimore Action Legal Team

My name is Iman Freeman and I am the Executive Director of Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT). I submit this testimony in favor of Senate Bill 853.

Baltimore Action Legal Team works from a community lawyering model, meaning that instead of using the law for an individual client, we work on behalf of the needs and requests of our community. Over the course of our work operating a bail fund, private home detention fund, education campaigns for the Baltimore Consent Decree, and executing litigation to protect community members from the harms of pretrial injustice, we have seen how the juvenile legal system truly operates. The juvenile legal system, and the legal system that allows juveniles to be charged as adults, is a major contributing factor to Maryland having the most disproportionately Black prison population in the country.

Our children; our students, church members, neighbors, employees, and customers, all serve vital functions in our society. These children are entitled to human dignity and we can't give that to them until we limit the amount of youth in prison, raise the age for youth to be charged, limit probation, and most importantly, increase diversion programming. Treating children like human beings makes them safer, makes our communities safer, and builds a real future for all of us.

I urge a favorable report on SB 853.