



**Maryland Juvenile Restoration Act
Senate Bill 494**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 494, the Juvenile Restoration Act, on behalf of PC Advocacy Initiative, an Ohio nonprofit corporation doing business as Players Coalition and recognized as a tax-exempt organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code ("Players Coalition").

Players Coalition, directly and in connection with its affiliate organization, PC Charitable Foundation, an Ohio nonprofit corporation recognized as a tax-exempt organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, works with professional athletes, coaches and owners across leagues to improve social justice and racial equality in our country. We work to make an impact at the federal, state, and local levels and have active members here in Maryland.

The United States is the only country in the world that sentences kids to die in prison. We know that the human brain does not fully develop until an individual is in his or her mid-twenties. Compared to adults, kids are less capable of long-term planning, regulating emotion, impulse control, and evaluating risk and reward. We also know that kids who commit crimes are often victims of crime themselves. Nationally, almost 80 percent of juvenile offenders witnessed violence in their homes and over half experienced violence weekly in their own neighborhoods. Many of these kids have not received the support and protection they needed and deserved. Incarcerating them for the rest of their lives stacks one atrocity onto another.

Players Coalition supports SB 494 because the bill will abolish the sentence of life without the possibility of parole for kids, and grant judicial review after 20 years for people who received extreme sentences while they were still children. The Supreme Court of the United States has acknowledged that children are fundamentally different from adults and deserve special consideration in our criminal justice system. Noting that kids have "diminished culpability and heightened capacity for change," the Court has held that life without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional in the vast majority of cases due to young people's remarkable potential to experience positive transformation and rehabilitation. However, in Maryland, 13 people are serving life without the possibility of parole, and over 300 more are serving sentences so long that they have no meaningful opportunity to demonstrate that they have been rehabilitated. These extreme sentences are disproportionately imposed against kids of color, with a Black child ten times more likely to be sentenced to life without parole than a white child. In Maryland specifically, 87 percent of the people who would be immediately eligible for judicial review under SB 494 are Black. Passing SB 494 is crucial as we reckon with the ways that race leads to disparate outcomes in the criminal justice system.



Furthermore, the data shows that when an individual who received a life sentence for a crime committed as a child is afforded a second chance at life outside prison, the rate of recidivism is astonishingly low – around a mere 1%. Research has also shown that incarcerating kids for longer than 15 to 20 years has diminished returns for public safety. It is worth noting that SB 494 does not guarantee release from prison to anyone, but it does give these individuals a pathway to redemption. SB 494 is supported by case law, adolescent brain science, data regarding recidivism rates, the prior experience of 24 other states, and common sense. Kids are fundamentally, constitutionally different from adults and, when they cause harm, must be held accountable in age-appropriate ways that leave room for rehabilitation and second chances. SB 494 is good public policy. It conforms to our most cherished values of compassion and redemption. It recognizes that children are simultaneously the most vulnerable members of our society and our most valuable resource for building a bright future. Therefore, no child is disposable. No child should be sentenced to die in prison.

On behalf of Players Coalition, we ask that you support SB 494. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony.

Sincerely,

Aveion Cason (NFL player, retired)

Jeremy Ebobisse (MLS, Portland Timbers)

Torrey Smith (NFL player, retired)