



"Being here for Maryland's Children, Youth, and Families"

Testimony submitted to Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 17, 2021

**SB 494 - Juveniles Convicted as Adults - Sentencing - Limitations and Reduction
Support**

The Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus, which represents a network of Bureaus throughout the State of Maryland, Supports SB494 Juveniles Convicted as Adults - Sentencing - Limitations and Reduction. Youth Service Bureaus provide prevention, intervention and treatment services to youth and their families. SB 494 will ensure that youth convicted as an adult can have the possibility of receiving a sentence less than the minimum term required by law, will be protected from receiving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole or release, and will allow those individuals who have been convicted as an adult for an offense committed as a minor the opportunity to file a motion to reduce the duration of the individual's sentence. MAYSB believes this bill supports the State's efforts to have a juvenile justice system that is developmentally informed and urges a favorable finding.

A developmentally informed approach to juvenile justice recognizes the need to hold youth accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources and opportunities to be rehabilitated. It recognizes that youth are still maturing and that their brains are not fully developed until after age 24. Youth who commit violent crimes that lead to their being charged as an adult should be held accountable for their actions and the harm they have done to others. They should not, however, be left without the possibility of rehabilitation and consideration for parole. Twenty-four states, including our neighbors of Delaware and West Virginia and the District of Columbia, have banned life sentences without the possibility of parole for juveniles. Maryland should follow their lead and recognize the science behind brain development. Maryland should be a leader in advocating that all children are capable of, and worthy of, redemption and deserve an opportunity for a second chance, regardless of their race, socio-economic background, or the crime of which they have been accused.

A developmentally informed system is also fair and works to ensure that all youth receive fair and equal treatment. This bill will assist the State of Maryland in addressing racial and ethnic disparities (RED) found in the juvenile justice system. Data in Maryland shows that youth of color are disproportionately impacted at each decision point in the juvenile justice system. The Data Resource Guide 2020 for the Department of Juvenile

Services indicates that of the total complaints received by DJS in 2020 (14,913) 71% were youth of color (10,691). For Youth whose cases were formalized, (5806) 78% were youth of color (4528). When one looks at youth transferred to the adult court (232 youth), 60% (136 youth) were youth of color. This bill will help increase the opportunity for fair treatment for youth of color at the time of sentencing as currently they are more likely to move further into the juvenile system and more likely to receive harsher sentences.

MAYSB believes that following a developmental informed approach to juvenile justice is important and allows youth the opportunity to be held accountable for their actions while also offering them the resources to develop and be rehabilitated. At its core this model recognizes that the thinking and maturity of juveniles is not equal to that of adults and works to offer them opportunities to change and learn from their mistakes.

We respectfully ask you to support this bill.

Respectfully Submitted:

Liz Park, PhD
MAYSB Chair
lpark@greenbeltmd.gov