

We, the Racial Justice Task Force at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring, support the premise of the Juvenile Restoration Act (HB409) which abolishes life without the possibility of parole for children. No child should ever be told that they have no hope but to die in prison.

HB409 ensures that all children in the state of Maryland have an opportunity to come before a judge for sentencing review after 20 years. However, we believe the 20 year time frame accorded in this bill remains cruel and woefully ignores what we know about adolescent development and the potential for change given the right resources. Supreme Court Justice Kagan wrote for the majority in *Miller v Alabama* (2012) that “Adolescence is marked by “transient rashness, proclivity for risk, and inability to assess consequences,” all factors that should mitigate the punishment received by juvenile defendants. We urge that the HB409 be amended to reflect what brain science tells us and to give adults sentenced as juveniles a second chance sooner than later.

We support HB409 because it will bring MD in line with governing US Supreme Court and MD jurisprudence while aligning it with 24 other states and the District of Columbia that have banned life without parole for children.

HB 409 will require courts to consider the child’s family and home environment at the time of the offense, the extent of the child’s participation in the crime, the child’s potential for rehabilitation and his or her demonstration of maturity and reform while incarcerated, when determining whether to grant release.

Extreme sentences for children disproportionately impact children of color. **At 82%, MD ranks first in the nation with the highest proportion of Black youth sentenced to life without parole. 87% of people who will be immediately eligible under 4B409, for crimes they committed as children, are Black. This is unacceptable.**

Bryan Stevenson has said, “Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” This is especially true of 15, 16, 17 year olds. Members of the House Judiciary Committee, we entreat you to pass an amended Juvenile Restoration Act as suggested above *this session*.

