

Submitted by: Mr. Tracey Akins, A directly impacted teen from Belcamp, MD (Harford County)

Senate Bill 35
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction
Child Interrogation Protection Act
Support

Sen. William Smith and Honorable Senate Judiciary Proceeding Committee,

My name is **Tracey Akins**. I am now 47 years old. I have lived in Harford County all my life. I am one of seven children. My mother was a single parent. I grew up in a black neighborhood in Edgewood, Maryland. When I was a young male around the age of 15, I started running around with the wrong crowd of people. One day, a “friend” and I decided to hook school to go see his girlfriend, who happened to be white. I stayed for a few minutes and then left to hang out at a family member's house for a while.

Then I returned back to the girlfriend’s house where my friend let me in and I sat down and watched TV. My friend went back into the bedroom with his girlfriend as I continued to watch TV. About 30 to 45 minutes later I heard someone banging on the front door and yelling. The girl came out of the room and then my friend followed her out. In fear, we jumped off the three-story balcony. While walking back home, a car started following us with a white male driver. He yelled out the window of the car that my friend was going to jail.

A day later two Harford County detectives knocked on my mother’s door. It was in the morning. My mother answered and invited them in. My Mom called me downstairs and said these detectives wanted to talk to me. After talking for a while, they asked my mother if they could take me to the police station to talk to me and they would bring me back. My Mother said OKAY and asked them would they bring me home because I had school. They told her yes.

I walked out with the detectives and got into the back of the car without handcuffs. They took me to the State Police Barracks in Bel Air, Maryland. The two detectives walked me into the room,

and I sat across from them. They started asking me questions about what took place at the girlfriend's house. They never read me my rights. They never asked me if I wanted a lawyer. Or if I wanted my mother there with me. They took a hair sample from me and at that time I didn't know why.

After hours of questioning, I began getting upset because they acted like they didn't believe me. I was tired and hungry. I wanted to go home. They gave me a lie detector test. I didn't even know what that was. They never explained why except it was necessary if I wanted to go home. I took it and they still questioned me over and over again for a few more hours. I was there for so many hours I lost count. They finally took me home. I remember being exhausted.

A few weeks later my mother got a summons in the mail saying I was going to be charged with rape, and six other charges. My Mother explained I was in a lot of trouble, and I could go to jail. Someone told my mother to get me a lawyer. So, she took me to see a public defender by the name of Amanda Bowl. She read the charges and told me I could go to jail for 25 years and that I should take a jury trial, so I did. I didn't know what that even meant, and my mother didn't either. Amanda told me it was best for what I was being charged with.

A few months later I went to court. I was on trial for four days. Being questioned over and over again. These 12 people looking at me and taking notes. There were big words being used that I didn't even know how to say or spell, and I had a learning disability and wasn't very good at understanding the meaning of what they were even saying about me or to me.

The girlfriend entered the courtroom. She walked up and took a seat. She testified that it was me that had raped her that day in her room. She pointed me out. I couldn't believe it. I felt like this trial went on forever getting harder to understand. Finally, the Judge said the jury could leave the courtroom. I knew at this time it was her word against mine. I had no idea what was happening.

My lawyer walked me into the hallway, where I sat in a chair for a long time. I waited for the jury to make their decision. How could this be? I never did anything wrong. But at this time, I had no control of the outcome. A few hours went by, and the jury came back into the courtroom.

They had found me not guilty. The trauma I had to go through is still lasting within me today. I could have lost my whole life, for something I have never done. It still hurts me today, to think about such a mean and nasty act on a woman by any man. And that's what I had been accused of by this white girl. If it wasn't for my lawyer, who was a public defender, I wouldn't have gone free that day.

I wish someone would have told my mother and me about Miranda rights. Just maybe what I went through with the police would not have ever happened. The saddest thing about all of this is that it still happens today. This type of interrogation is still happening daily and that's why we need this Child Interrogation Protection Act passed right now. My life was spared but so many other black children are still being affected and losing their lives because their rights are being taken away from them.

Tracey Akins,

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A Directly Impacted Teen