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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB53/HB269
Juvenile Law - Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Samantha Blau, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Samantha Blau, I am a resident of Baltimore's Patterson Place neighborhood, in District 46. I am also a former educator with over ten year's experience working with students and teachers in Baltimore City and across the state of Maryland. As a teacher, an organizer, and a resident of Baltimore I submit this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice in favor of SB53/HB269, Juvenile Law - Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

In the Jewish tradition we describe children as a Divine trust and guarantors of the future. The Book of Psalms (127 v.3) declares "children are an inheritance from the Lord." The Maryland General Assembly passed the "Blueprint for Maryland's Future" to fully and equitably fund education because this body acknowledged that children are the hope of the future, and as I submit testimony on this bill for the fourth year in a row I hope that we can follow through on the words we often speak and the values we claim to have.

It is our sacred duty to treat children lovingly and humanely and doing so makes them healthier adults. Despite this, children do not have many rights in our society and here in Maryland we are not doing enough to protect the due process rights of our kids. Right now, a police officer in Maryland can pick a child up for questioning, determine that the child has waived their right to counsel, and go about questioning them. SB53 would change that, by mandating that young people have access to legal counsel before being interrogated by police.

Before I can pick up my nieces and nephews from summer camp, the camp facility needs prior authorization from their parents and I need to produce a state issued photo ID. I wonder how, in a society that claims to value children, their futures, and their safety, we can currently allow a police officer - a stranger - to take possession of a child and not notify their parent or guardian. How can we allow this stranger to make a potentially life-altering decision for them, like the decision as to whether they understand their Miranda rights? Studies show that children waive their Miranda rights at a rate of 90%¹ and make false confessions at a higher rate than adults². Kids should be provided with legal counsel to ensure they act fully understanding their rights and what is happening - a well-informed adult to guide them and prevent false confessions.

On behalf of JUFJ, I urge this committee to **issue a favorable report on SB53/HB269 as swiftly as possible.** I care about our children and they need this bill to become law.

¹ <https://jlc.org/issues/youth-interrogations>

² <https://abcnews.go.com/US/30000-children-age-10-arrested-us-2013-fbi/story?id=65798787>