



MD JUVENILE JUSTICE COALITION
PO BOX 1282
BOWIE, MD 20718

Senate Bill 53
Child Interrogation Protection Act
January 27, 2022
Favorable

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition (MDJJC) is a grassroots organization that unites and mobilizes constituents for juvenile justice reform in Maryland. MDJJC supported the Juvenile Restoration Act (JRA) last session because we believe in meaningful reform to protect the vulnerable children of this state. Our organization will advocate for any opportunity to create a criminal justice system more aligned with developmental science and research. This committee is prioritizing legislation to combat racial inequities, and this bill, if passed, will do just that.

The Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition supports Senate Bill 53, the Child Interrogation Protection Act. Every day in Maryland, children entangled in the criminal legal system are questioned without a parent being notified or attorney present. Although youth of all races commit offenses at roughly the same rates, African American youth are arrested at much higher rates than any other racial group in this state, and therefore are at particularly high risk of facing police interrogations and coercion. As a result, Black children face criminal charges, prosecution, and incarceration without the basic due process rights that adults are entitled to. We believe any young person facing a police interrogation has the legal right to ask for a lawyer before answering questions and have their guardian notified, SB 53 the Child Interrogation Protection Act will protect those rights.

The Child Interrogation Protection Act will:

- 1) Require law enforcement to make good faith efforts to notify parents or guardians that their child will be subject to interrogation;
- 2) Allow a child to consult with an attorney prior to being interrogated; and
- 3) Encourage Maryland courts to adopt age-appropriate language for children to understand their rights.

Adolescent brain development coupled with behavioral psychology and sociological literature on coercive persuasion and interrogation-induced false confessions explain why youth are prone to comply with the requests of authority figures like police or school resource officers (SRO's), making them uniquely vulnerable to coercive interrogation tactics. It is imperative to keep a continued understanding of adolescent brain development and behavior psychology at the forefront of this discourse to ensure we are adequately discussing the dangers of youth interrogations. Further, it is critical to recognize that the goal of interrogations is to elicit incriminating statements, admissions and/or confessions through the use of psychological methods that are explicitly confrontational, manipulative, and suggestive.

The Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition urges this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 53.

Respectfully,

Jayna Peterson

Co-founder and Director of Legislative Affairs

Fatima Razi

Co-founder and Executive Director