

My name is Anita Lampel. I live in District 16. I offer my written testimony in favor of SB 53/HB 269.

I was stunned to see that Maryland maintains that children as young as seven-years-old can be held to answer in Juvenile Court for their actions. Really! That's the age where lots of kids still believe in Santa Claus. My background and training is in child and adolescent mental health issues, and I have a Ph.D. from Stanford University. I've headed a department of child and adolescent mental health, served on commissions and committees addressing the needs of juvenile offenders, and given expert testimony in juvenile courts. I can state unequivocally that children and youth do not think in the same way as adults.

Children and youth are protected groups in society because they do not have the reasoning skills or behavioral controls that come with adulthood. As research shows definitively, their vulnerabilities are worse if they live in poverty, are exposed to violence, have learning disabilities, and are members of targeted groups, such as being Black. And, Black children are routinely viewed as somehow more "mature" at a young age than white children, putting them at even more risk of being treated badly if caught up in the justice system, like being questioned by a police officer. Children and youth are far more likely to give false confessions, to not understand the consequences of their statements, and to conform to what the pressure of the moment is.

Children and youth whose freedom, whose ability to live with family and in their community, are at risk whenever they are questioned by law enforcement must have legal counsel before being questioned and their parents must be notified that they are being questioned. This is the standard in most civilized countries. This is the standard supported by every major advocacy group for children, including the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and others.

Maryland has a higher percent of youth in the juvenile justice system than almost any other state. This school to prison pipeline must stop. Adequate protection at the beginning is one step in that direction.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for Bill SB53/HB269.

Thank you.