

January 27, 2022
Louise M. Weissman
Greenbelt, 20770

TESTIMONY ON (SB#0053HB#0269) - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Law - Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act

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

FROM: Louise M. Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of District 22 in Greenbelt. I am submitting this testimony (in support of/in support with amendments/against) SB0053/HB#0269), Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act.

Thank you Senator Carter and Delegate Sandy Bartlett for sponsoring this bill. In 1997 a 10-year old girl in Foster Care was placed with us for adoption, along with her biological brother. As a teen and adult, she has had run-ins with law-enforcement. I care about this bill because without family intervention and legal counsel, especially as a teenager, we don't know how or if she would have survived.

Shortly after she came to live with us, it was clear that she needed extensive educational and therapeutic services. She had experienced significant neglect as well as mental and physical abuse. During primary school and high school she went through a revolving door of in-patient psychiatric hospital admissions and three different residential placements. When she was 14, an MRI was ordered. We learned she had a tumor on the front left lobe of her brain.

Now almost 35, she has been diagnosed with Complex PTSD, and Bi-Polar disorder. While she has been in court as a youth, we intervened at that time and made sure a lawyer was retained if needed. She never served time, due in large part to the legal support we provided her and our pro-active presence. I also strongly believe white privilege played a role in the outcome.

No child should be interrogated by law enforcement without being able to consult a lawyer. But Maryland does not mandate that young people have access to legal counsel before being interrogated by police. This contributes to the School to Prison Pipeline. It especially leads to the criminalization and incarceration of Black and brown youth who are disproportionately targeted by our justice system.

This legislation would require police to attempt to contact a juvenile's parents and require that the child be given the opportunity to speak to a lawyer prior to police interrogation.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0053HB#/0269.