



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB 53 – Juvenile Law – Child Interrogation Protection Act
Before the Judiciary Committee
On March 23 , 2022**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

A child may be able to comprehend their homework or take a school exam on their own, but when that same child is isolated in a cold and dark room surrounded by adult law enforcement officers asking them questions about crimes they may know nothing about, an adult must be present to help the child do what is in their best interest.

Senate Bill 53 acknowledges what we already know – frightened children will say anything. This bill provides safeguards against false confession from children. The bill acknowledges that under current law, children are not afforded any additional protections during custodial interrogations and as a result, because children are more impressionable than adults, they are more likely to give false confessions or statements to police.

Under Senate Bill 53, a child’s parent or guardian must be notified that the child is in custody and must be given the opportunity to make in-person contact with the child. The bill also requires that a child is

given a private consultation with an attorney prior to police interrogation.

Not only does Senate Bill 53 protect children, but it protects the community at large. Implementing these steps would ensure that police are receiving the most accurate information a child can provide. False confessions send innocent people to prison. They also send investigators down blind alleys and allow actual wrongdoers to evade accountability.

Without these measures, we will hear more stories like the one of 14-year-old [Davontae Sanford](#) in Michigan who admitted to a quadruple homicide that he did not commit after being arrested in his pajamas and interrogated for over 24 hours without either a parent or attorney present. He confessed because the police told him that if he did, he could go home. Or 16-year-old [Brendan Dassey](#) from Wisconsin, who confessed to a murder his uncle actually committed because the investigators, in his words, “got into my head. They got me to say whatever they wanted”. Or 16-year-old [Ransom Watkins, Andrew Stewart, and Alfred Chestnut](#) from Baltimore City who each received life sentences after witness statements were given implicating them in the murder of another teenager. It was later discovered that those witness statements were coerced by the police and prosecutors. After spending 36 years in prison for a crime they did not commit, Watkins, Stewart and Chestnut were finally exonerated in 2019.

This bill gives the parent, the child, and the investigators clear directions to ensure the well-being of the child and the integrity of the investigation.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 53 from this committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "P" and "C".

Jill P. Carter