



February 8, 2024

House Bill 0814 Juvenile Law- Reform
Position: OPPOSE

Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jack Burton, I am the executive director of a non-profit, Tender Bridge, and I am writing to express my opposition to HB0814, Juvenile Law- Reform. Tender Bridge engages youth and young adults ages 5-25 from the most marginalized neighborhoods in East Baltimore. We see the youth in our family and community as dealing with two major challenges 1) un-attended-to trauma, and 2) un-attended-to potential, often in unfathomably extreme cases. The confluence of these challenges is a critical problem in our city that we see and aim to solve daily, through many types of meaningful engagement; sports, adventures, mentorship, group support, access to life sustaining needs, and education- and career-support among other things.

While acknowledging the increase in youth involvement in crime and the need to seek resolution, I've seen first-hand the damages brought upon youth by the penal system and I am confident the proposed reform would hurt, not help, the crisis before us. Intake and incarceration for youth in these challenged circumstances is demoralizing, traumatizing, and debilitating. The "need for correction" or "need to hold youth accountable" addressed in the proposed reform does not help positively change the trajectory of the ailing, marginalized, and preadolescent youth that would be affected by this bill. This reform puts molding minds at risk of compound trauma, families at risk of heart break, hopes at risk of extinction and recidivism at risk of elevation. I firmly believe there is a need to address the challenges before us, both the challenges youth face and the challenges that youth are bringing upon our society. I am confident this is not the solution and I urge you to practice empathy and vote unfavorably on HB0814.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Burton".

Jack Burton,
Executive Director