

House Bill 0814 Juvenile Law - Reform

Judiciary Committee, February 7, 2024

Position: **OPPOSE**

Members of the Judiciary Committee, we are unable to testify in person and greatly appreciate the opportunity to express our opposition to HB0814, Juvenile Law – Reform with this written testimony.

We volunteer for a non-profit organization in Baltimore City that founded an ice hockey program called the Baltimore Banners. Our two hockey teams are made up of resilient boys and young men, hurdling unimaginable challenges in their lives. In our years of learning from and serving these youth, we have witnessed many instances where the juvenile “justice” system has brought devastating consequences to kids and their families. We clearly see that to reduce crime, Maryland must invest in services necessary to address the multiple injustices undermining a child’s ability to learn, thrive and reach their great potential.

The Banners Hockey program is comprised of Black youth from historically marginalized communities. We have lost players to death from violence and several have experienced incarceration. Their needs are varied, complex and urgent. If you could see deeply into their lives, you would learn that offending behaviors stem from traumatic circumstances and not malice. Young offenders need help, support and opportunities not banishment from society and supportive loved ones. The detention of a child has community-wide reverberations that predict adverse life experiences and perpetuate generational trauma for many.

In 2020, Maryland was named among the worst human rights offenders *in the country* for its treatment of children in the criminal legal system. In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly passed the bipartisan Juvenile Justice Reform Act (JJRA) to address some of the worst aspects of Maryland's dangerously punitive juvenile justice system. Academics and professionals provided solid evidence about the harm of Maryland’s processes of intake, detention and probation on young kids. The promising passage of JJRA is now threatened by HB0814 with provisions that walk back the hope for positive systemic reform.

HB0814 will not help children nor keep communities safer. On the contrary, HB0814 will bring more 10–12-year-olds into the criminal court system and youth jails. HB0814 removes several avenues of diversion, and elevates a child’s risk for dangerous life experiences, future incarceration and lost potential.

We urge the kids in our program to speak up about their experiences. Most of them do not trust their government. Very few of them register to vote when they turn 18. In soliciting their opinion about HB0814, twelve-year-old Quantez Newton, a Banners hockey player and resident of Baltimore City, asked that his text to a coach-mentor be shared with you. We hope you will heed the message he sent in the below text:

“Kids the age of 10-12 shouldn’t go to jail even if they do something bad just discipline them they shouldn’t go to jail they sending them to jail to make them worse then what they are making them depressed and do more bad things we should live our life and continue to do great things to make us better people we need to live our life as children and be children” (Quantez Newton, age 12)

We respectfully urge your unfavorable vote on HB0814.

Kim Burton, Baltimore County resident

Laura Classick, Baltimore County resident

Jennifer Salerno, Baltimore County resident

Ashton Taylor, Baltimore County resident

(Contact: Kim Burton, 12911 Gent Rd. Reisterstown, MD 21136, kscburton@gmail.com or 410- 598-4002)