

February 6, 2024

Dear Senators and Delegates,

My name is Lynda Davis. I am a resident of District 12B. I am submitting this testimony against Juvenile Law - Reform (HB 814/SB 744) as a private individual and not as a representative of any group or organization. I am deeply disappointed in the Governor, the leadership of the Maryland General Assembly and all of you for proposing and supporting this anti-youth justice legislation (HB 814/SB 744). I am urging you to vote against Juvenile Law - Reform HB 814/SB 744.

My testimony includes information from statements made by the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC); Natasha M. Dartigue, Maryland Office of the Public Defender; and Jews United for Justice.

I believe these bills were put forward because of a *perception*, not the reality, of an increase in crime. This legislation proposes changes in law which rollback elements of the progress made with the 2022 Juvenile Justice Reform Act and it is out of step with what data shows are effective juvenile justice policies. Ultimately, the impact of these proposals will be to incarcerate thousands more children, specifically Black and Brown children who statistically are put into the juvenile and adult criminal legal systems more than white children. I had just heard people decrying that Maryland incarcerates the most Black people than any other state in the United States. These bills would increase that number. Is this what we want Maryland to continue to be known for? More to the point is this what we want to do to our **children**?

Why not pass bills that increase services for children before they commit crimes? Governor Moore just created an Office for Children and an Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (see [Governor Moore Signs Executive Order Establishing the Governor's Office for Children and Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy](#)). He said language matters and he did not want children associated with crime as they were in the previous title for the Governor's Office for Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. In this press release, it says that

“The Governor's Office for Children will lead statewide efforts to build a comprehensive network of supports, programs, and services for children and their families to promote social and emotional well-being; reduce food insecurity; combat youth homelessness; expand access to health services; improve education outcomes and job readiness; expand access to good jobs; and increase economic opportunity in sustainable ways. The office will drive a holistic, coordinated approach within state government and across public and private sectors at the federal, state, and local levels.”

This is exactly what we should be doing for all of our children. The Juvenile Law - Reform bills would be doing the opposite: spending all of our resources on crime and punishment.

The Juvenile Law - Reform bills undermine several important provisions of the 2022 Juvenile Justice Restoration Act and ignore over 20 years of research and data on the most effective ways to hold children accountable and improve safety. Instead of investing in programming and services that are proven to change behavior, this legislation will make us less safe by punishing children who need support and giving a pass to our state's dysfunctional law enforcement and juvenile justice systems. Rather than focusing on restorative measures or addressing the root causes of crime, this legislation reverts back to some of the pre- juvenile justice reform act changes and includes various punitive provisions that would entangle kids further in the justice

system. The 2022 reforms recognized the need to shift from punitive-centered approaches. A return to outdated “tough on crime” measures will not make communities safer especially where the underlying causes of crime remain unaddressed. Communities and individuals like me do not want to see Maryland’s resources focused on filling detention facilities when proactive efforts to address the underlying causes of these behaviors are more effective, responsible, and humane.

I agree with the solution proposed by Natasha M. Dartigue, Maryland Office of the Public Defender. She said

“The solution lies in establishing a Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices, which with the proper balance of stakeholders is the logical continuation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Council that drafted the 2022 laws. Those serious about safety must allow such a commission to build on the progress made, identify where resources can be reallocated to reduce incarceration, and promote positive adjustment, rather than be forced to examine a continuing record of Maryland refusing to care for its children...”

It is for all of these reasons that I respectfully urge you to return an unfavorable report on Juvenile Law - Reform (HB 814/SB 744).

Sincerely,

Lynda Davis  
Linthicum, MD