

Feb. 8, 2024

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TESTIMONY ON HB814 - UNFAVORABLE
Juvenile Law - Reform

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Evan Serpick

My name is Evan Serpick. I am a resident of District 41. I am submitting this testimony against SB744, Juvenile Law-Reform.

I am the chair of the Social Action Committee at Beth Am Synagogue in Baltimore City and an Ambassador for Baltimore Peace Movement, and I have been a journalist and communications professional for 25 years. As an obsessive media-watcher, I have noticed that policymakers sometimes respond more to media-driven perceptions and narrative than to reality. When they do, they may advance laws that are counter-productive, often exacerbating problems they are trying to address rather than solve them. I fear that's exactly what's happening with the juvenile justice legislation being proposed here.

At the press conference announcing this legislation, Senate President Bill Ferguson said, "While youth account for less than 10% of the crimes committed, unfortunately, it is clear that they've become the largest part of the crime perception challenge in Maryland."

Rabbi Daniel Burg referenced this comment during a sermon at Beth Am Synagogue on Feb. 3, saying, "To my mind it begs a question: If the problem is crime perception, if the problem is how we think about our youth, wouldn't courageous leadership in this moment challenge those false assumptions, to help Maryland residents recalibrate perceptions to match reality?"

At the press conference announcing this legislation, Governor Wes Moore More emphasized the need for "more funding for programs that uplift our kids," but this legislation offers no additional support or funding for programming, services, or even positive incentives for children in the system. Rather, it is simply a return to pro-carceral, law-enforcement-dependent measures where the onus and the only "accountability" falls on the shoulders of children as young as 10, or even younger.

All the evidence shows that incarcerating children makes them more likely to be arrested for new offenses, not less. Yet this legislation will see thousands more kids incarcerated every year, particularly Black and Brown children, exacerbating the already serious racial disparities in

Maryland's juvenile justice system. And as a result, this legislation will make Marylanders less safe, not more.

I urge you to have the courage to act out of reason and wisdom, not in response to acknowledged false media-driven narratives. **I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on HB814.**