



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Commission on Juvenile Justice

Marc Elrich
County Executive

James C. Bridgers, Jr. Ph.D., MBA
Director

February 9, 2024

SB 744 -- Unfavorable

Senator Will Smith
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Senator Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Juvenile Justice (MC CJJ) on Senate Bill 744.

MC CJJ was established to advise the Montgomery County Executive, County Council and the Juvenile Court on matters concerning juvenile justice. Our work includes gathering and disseminating information from public and private agencies serving youth, monitoring juvenile justice programs and services, visiting facilities, closely following relevant State and local legislation, and making recommendations regarding juvenile needs. MC CJJ is composed of appointed, volunteer citizen members, and agency members that include the Child Welfare Services Program, the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, the Montgomery County Police Department, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services.

MC CJJ strongly supports efforts to close service gaps and to improve access to services for families and children, especially those that address the mental health, emotional, behavioral, and social needs of troubled youth and that are developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed.

We do not support the use of punitive mechanisms—such as arrest, detention, or prolonged probation—to get children needed services and treatment, especially as research tells us that these approaches result in negative outcomes for children such as not completing school or future justice involvement. The Commission supported the Juvenile Justice Reform Act (JJRA) because it made changes in the law that took into account what science and decades of research tell us about how children differ from adults and how best to achieve positive outcomes for them, especially when they engage in unwanted behavior. Notably, these reforms were the product of years of study and debate by a group of distinguished experts, advocates, and legislators, a group established by law to advise the legislature. It has been a year and a half since the JJRA became effective in June 2022, hardly enough time to achieve full implementation and certainly too early to undo important reforms rooted in evidence without data that suggest adjustments need to be made immediately.

The MGA Leadership would have benefited from input from experts and advocates in developing its bill. We are very disappointed that the Committee Chairs quickly announced hearing dates that do not allow enough time for the public to review the details of a long bill that was held close until it was introduced

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last week. It would be misguided and harmful for the Committee to proceed with a vote on this bill without further opportunities for public input and discussion about alternative ways of addressing the issues and concerns. Therefore, in lieu of making changes in the law—without meaningful public input—that would potentially have long lasting negative consequences for children without improving public safety, we recommend that the Leadership consider reconstituting the Juvenile Justice Reform Council or establishing a new body akin to the Commission described in the bill to examine the issues and explore evidence-based solutions for addressing them.

For these reasons, we request an Unfavorable report on SB 744.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redden".

Kevin Redden, Chair

Montgomery County Commission on Juvenile Justice