Keeping Juvenile Cases in Juvenile Court

Maryland sends more young people to adult courts, per capita, than any other state except Alabama. Research shows that automatically prosecuting children as adults does not lower recidivism or enhance community safety.

For the past 14 years, advocates have been lobbying to change Maryland law, so young people will receive better treatment and stronger protection when arrested. They should not be automatically sent to adult court, but rather to juvenile court, unless they are charged with a heinous crime. Today, there are 33 offenses that automatically send Maryland children to an adult detention center upon arrest. 85% of them ultimately return to juvenile court or have their cases dismissed. In the meantime, many spend up to 180 days housed in adult jail while awaiting trial. In this setting, they are vulnerable to adult criminals and are not eligible to receive educational support or behavioral health services that would be provided in the juvenile system.

SB323/HB409: Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction - Youth Charging Reform Act (Sen. Will Smith/Del. Sandy Bartlett)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee/House Judiciary Committee
This bill would alter the jurisdiction of the juvenile and adult court systems by raising the age children would be tried as adults from 14 to 16, unless they are charged with serious violent crimes that would be punishable by life imprisonment.

Why is this important to the Jewish Community?

Our Jewish values teach us to pursue equity and justice. Not only is it unjust for children not charged with a violent crime to automatically be sent to adult court; it is also highly problematic in that 81% of juveniles charged in adult courts in Maryland are Black. It is time for Maryland to fall in line with the rest of the nation. We believe children should be treated as children and given the support they need in the juvenile justice system, with access to rehabilitative services and not punitive action of the adult system.