



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE  
PUBLIC DEFENDER

# YOUTH CHARGING REFORM ACT

House Bill 409 - Sponsor Delegate Bartlett

Senate Bill 323 - Sponsor Senator Smith

2026 Legislative Priority | Protect Children

## PROBLEM:



Maryland leads the nation in automatically charging children as adults. Kids as young as 14 face adult detention and prosecution for 33 different offenses.

**Almost 85% of these cases return to juvenile court or are dismissed.**

## HARM:



### RACIAL INJUSTICE AND LIFELONG DAMAGE

- 80% of children charged as adults are Black (despite Black children comprising only 30% of Maryland's child population).
- 70% experienced 6+ traumatic childhood events (ACEs) before arrest; 55% have a diagnosed disability (physical, mental, or learning).

### UNDERMINES COMMUNITY SAFETY

- Children prosecuted in the adult system are more likely to reoffend and commit more serious crimes than those adjudicated in juvenile court.

### FEDERAL LAW VIOLATION AND DANGEROUS

- Children charged as adults are held in adult facilities in violation of federal law. Maryland reports more violations than any other state.
- Children endure violence and solitary confinement.

### DELAYS JUSTICE AND DRAINS RESOURCES

- Children charged as adults wait 125+ days in detention—some wait 2 years for trial. In juvenile court, detained cases must be heard within 30 days.
- Ending auto-charging would save Maryland \$17 million annually and reduce detention populations.

## SOLUTION:



## START ALL CASES IN JUVENILE COURT

- Saves millions in taxpayer money
- Protects children from violence and trauma
- Delivers justice faster
- Maintains judicial discretion for serious cases



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