



POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports the use of specialized judges, counseling services, and coordinated programs and services provided by state agencies in the administration of juvenile cases. The League also believes, for these programs and services to be effective, they must be geared to working with the families of the juveniles involved.

HB 96 would expand juvenile court jurisdiction over children of various ages charged with committing crimes of violence and specific violent acts, and who have previously been convicted as adults. Juvenile courts recognize that adolescents' brains are in a stage of neuro-psychological development that requires a different judicial approach than with adult offenders. Also, a minor's capacity to understand legal terminology and procedures when treated as an adult makes them extremely vulnerable within the system.

Expanding the jurisdiction of the juvenile court would avoid the exponential harm experienced by child offenders when introduced into the adult justice system. Young offenders are vulnerable to violence, manipulation, and abuse when detained as adults. Moreover, restoring the jurisdiction of the juvenile court would address the disparate racial impact of prosecuting juveniles as adults, as described in the Racial Equity Impact Note prepared by DLS for SB 165, a similar bill considered in the 2022 General Assembly session.

Because the provision of services tailored to the needs of juveniles is essential for the successful implementation of this bill, we urge the General Assembly to also work with the Governor to ensure that juvenile justice services are adequately funded.

We urge a favorable report on HB 96.