



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SB 94 – Juvenile Court - Intake and Probation

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports the use of specialized judges, counseling services, and coordination of programs and services provided by the state agencies in the administration of juvenile cases. These programs and services must be geared to working with the families of the juveniles involved in order to be effective. Juveniles are in a critical stage of development, with still-developing decision-making abilities and impulse control. An effective justice system will recognize their greater potential for rehabilitation, offering opportunities for support and intervention to address the root causes of delinquent behavior. Juvenile court procedures should align with these principles to promote the best interests of Maryland's youth. Such an approach would be more effective in protecting the future prospects of young offenders.

Our principal concern with SB 94 is its elimination of provisions allowing for an individualized assessment of each offender. This promotes the tailoring of programs to assist young offenders to get on a path to responsible adulthood. This will have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable youth, particularly those from marginalized communities. Requiring the forwarding of more cases to the State's Attorney without consideration of rehabilitation and diversion options may fail to address the root causes of juvenile delinquency.

The proposed increase in the maximum length of probation is also troubling as it seems inconsistent with the rapid development of decision-making skills in juveniles. This may encourage sentencing with longer terms of probation, entangling youth in the justice system for unnecessarily extended periods.

It is also essential to assess the potential impact of the proposed changes on racial disparities within the juvenile justice system. Ensuring that these changes do not disproportionately affect youth of color should be a priority.

We urge you to issue an unfavorable report on SB 94.