

Special Tribute

Judge George B. Rasin: A Champion for Maryland's Children



George Rasin as a child in the mid-1920's.



George Rasin at 10 years old, with his grandparents.



George Rasin as a child in the late-1920's.

Throughout his life, George B. Rasin worked tirelessly to build a better world for youth and families in Maryland. This was no more apparent than his passion to improve the juvenile justice system. Appointed to the Circuit Court of Kent County in 1960 as the youngest circuit court judge at the time, Judge Rasin's work laid the foundations of today's juvenile justice system in Maryland. Even in his later years, Judge Rasin continued to advocate for his vision that a separate and specialized system of justice for youth benefits not only the youth involved in the system but all of society.

In the first half of the 20th century, youth accused of wrong-doing in Maryland were addressed informally by the Department of Public Welfare and/or a local justice of the peace. The first juvenile court in Maryland was created by the General Assembly in 1943 in Baltimore City. Over the course of the next two decades, juvenile courts spread to all of the counties in Maryland with jurisdiction over young people up to age 18. In the landmark case of "In Re Gault," the Supreme Court held that youth deserved full constitutional protections in juvenile court. Despite these major court reforms, youth in the juvenile justice system lacked consistent access to support and services throughout the State.

In 1963, Judge Rasin was appointed to serve on the State Advisory Council on Child Welfare ("Council"). The Council focused on how Maryland's system of juvenile justice had no standard practices and procedures that applied consistently throughout the State. In essence, Maryland lacked a single administrative agency outside of the juvenile courts that could uniformly manage, supervise, and support youth in the juvenile system.

In 1964 and 1965, Judge Rasin as the Chair of the Legislative Council Committee on Juvenile Courts ("Committee") sought to convince the General Assembly that Maryland's juvenile justice system needed significant reforms. In 1967, the "Rasin Report" issued by the Committee led to the passage of legislation that created the Department of Juvenile Services. The new agency would have authority over State-operated detention and treatment facilities and would manage activities such as probation and supervision in the community.

The creation of the Department of Juvenile Services, which officially began its operations in 1969, was a major success. But Judge Rasin, fueled by his passion,



George Rasin with his mother and grandfather in Kent County.



George Rasin in the Army before Pearl Harbor. He was later assigned to Counter Intelligence and reached the rank of Captain.



Judge George Rasin at his retirement party in 1987.

continued his efforts to reform juvenile justice in Maryland and beyond. He served as the first Chair of the State Advisory Board for Juvenile Services and later chaired the Commission on Youth Offenders in 1970. Judge Rasin also chaired the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council for 14 years. Under Judge Rasin's leadership, the JJAC allocated federal funds to numerous delinquency prevention and treatment programs to benefit youth in Maryland. Judge Rasin's expertise in both criminal and juvenile justice garnered national attention as he was named to the President's Commission on Crime in the late 1960's. That Commission later created the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, which continues today as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

After a distinguished career on the bench, Judge Rasin retired in 1987, although he continued to serve in a limited capacity as a settlement judge until 2006. Even in his semi-retirement and later years, Judge Rasin never stopped being an advocate for youth in the juvenile justice system. During the 1990's when policy makers both in Maryland and United States began to take a more punitive approach with adult and youth offenders, Judge Rasin spoke out in opposition. In a Kent County News newspaper article, Judge Rasin lamented that by placing juvenile offenders with adult criminals in jail settings, juveniles would be at high risk for being abused and assaulted. He concluded that those policies were "taking us back to the Dark Ages of prison policy." Judge Rasin continued to be a fierce advocate for youth for the remainder of his life.



Judge George Rasin with his daughter Judge Gale Rasin at her investiture ceremony for the Baltimore City Circuit Court in 2004.

George Rasin died on December 23, 2011 at the age of 94. He was a World War II veteran, distinguished attorney and judge, father, grandfather and a lifelong champion for Maryland's youth. The existence of the Department of Juvenile Services represents a part of the amazing legacy of Judge Rasin and his work to improve the juvenile justice system in Maryland. Irrespective of the political climate, Judge Rasin never wavered in his vision of a juvenile justice system that was uniquely focused on improving the lives of youth and, ultimately, benefiting all of society. Today, DJS carries the legacy of Judge Rasin forward with its vision that embodies his ideals: "Successful Youth. Strong Leaders. Safer Communities." In every youth and family served by DJS, Judge Rasin's incredible legacy lives on.

DJS would like to thank Judge Gary Bair and Judge Rasin's daughter, Judge Gale Rasin, for their respective contributions to this tribute.