

Thank you for receiving my testimony. My name is Christine O'Grady. I am a parent and a member of the Middlesex Coalition for Children. I am asking for your support for bill number HR 5782. I am a mother of a ten, eight and seven year old in Middletown.

I was first concerned about the "gray area" when attending a Coalition meeting and a case worker stood up and described how a young 16 year old girl had been incarcerated in an adult prison for running away repeatedly. This was her terrible crime. While in the institution, her cellmate was a convicted murderer. This cellmate described in horrific detail her years of crime and violence. If that was not enough to scar this girl for life, the cellmate killed herself in front of this girl. No amount of counseling or love will repair this child's memory. So, for the next 65 years (if she lives to her life expectancy), this girl will carry the scars which our system inflicted on her.

I attended the Juvenile Justice Educational Forum provided at the capitol in February of this year. I was very grateful for the opportunity to listen to the powerful presenters. In particular, I listened to Abigail Baird PhD of Dartmouth College discuss the timeline for brain development as it relates to function and capacity. It is clear through her research (at least to me as a previous psychology major) that a 16 or 17 year old brain is not capable of the abstract thought needed to ALWAYS make appropriate adult decisions. The frontal cortex is not developed enough to consistently provide appropriate behavioral responses. Does this mean that the 16 and 17 year olds *shouldn't* be held accountable for their actions? Absolutely not! But, given their occasional limitations, it is clear to me these children (and they are still children) should not be institutionalized with adults. We only create more criminals this way.

Do you remember this news recently? "WOODBURY - A police officer in Woodbury is facing more child porn charges. Officer Terrance Langin is accused of 'downloading' nearly thirty thousand images of child porn off the internet. Now prosecutors have charged him with two more felonies related to 'posting' lewd images online. Langin is suspended from the department. He has a wife and a teenage son." (Hartford Courant). Do you realize that this officer approached a child on-line, but, because the courts do not recognize 16 and 17 year olds as children, certain charges had to be dropped. I, for one, was disgusted.

There clearly is a reason why we are one of 3 states in the country with gray area legislation. Either we are on the cutting edge of a new approach or we are dinosaurs trying to make it through the ice age. This gray area law has been in effect since 1971. Time to commit the dinosaur to a museum.

Should you wish to contact me you may do so at 860-347-4856, or the address below.

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