

March 13, 2006

Dear Colleague,

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation at the recent Judiciary Committee informational forum on returning 16 & 17 year olds to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and to urge your support of legislation to address this critical issue.

As we discussed at the forum, Connecticut is one of only three states nationwide that *automatically* treats all children over the age of 15 as adults *no matter how minor the offense*. The informational forum highlighted research that shows that this policy does not work and needs to be re-examined. Testimony provided by Dr. Donna Bishop of Northeastern University demonstrated that trying and sentencing youth in adult court does not decrease recidivism, and in fact actually *increases* crime. Dr. Bishop cited several studies indicating that recidivism rates were higher and re-arrests occurred more quickly for youth prosecuted in adult court than similar youth handled in juvenile courts. Additionally, Dr. Abigail Baird's lively testimony gave us insight into how the adolescent brain differs from that of an adult and as a result, kids ought to be treated differently by the justice system especially as they are more receptive to rehabilitation.

This week, the Judiciary Committee has introduced legislation (H.B. 5782) that would return juvenile court jurisdiction for 16 & 17 year olds. This legislation has broad, bi-partisan support and the Judiciary Committee's public hearing on this issue will be held this afternoon (Monday, March 13).

I hope you will lend this legislation your full support and that you will work with me to ensure its passage this year. Your consideration is greatly appreciated and I look forward to talking with you about this important issue. I've enclosed a packet of press clips from the informational forum for your convenience and hope you won't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Together, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of Connecticut's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Toni Walker