

TESTIMONY FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

March 13, 2006

In Support of H.B. 5782

Provided by Norma Schatz

My name is Norma Schatz. I write, as a citizen long involved with juvenile justice policy and programs, to support legislation to raise the age to 18 for those referred to Juvenile Court.

There are many reasons why, except for those who commit serious, violent crimes, children under 18 should be dealt with in Juvenile Court. The Juvenile Court should act as a sieve, holding all accountable, but responding with the most appropriate avenue to treatment, rehabilitation and value to society. While justice is still an art, not a science, there are assessment tools and programs and policies that make decisions more assured.

Others will probably discuss important reasons for raising the age, such as

- new discoveries in adolescent brain development that show delayed or impaired judgment and reasoning;
- the background of many of these youngsters involving abuse, dysfunctional families, the need for better role models;
- group activities that bring in first-time co-offenders and the beginning of a "record".

I would like to address a very pragmatic issue that affects both offender and the larger community's future: a permanent record, as a result of transfer to criminal court, will affect a young person's employability and earnings, associates and family life.

If we truly believe that "our children are our future", we must make every effort to redirect as many as possible of those who have slipped (or jumped) off the path back toward healthy and productive adulthood - as employees, as citizens, as parents.