

Center for Children's Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law
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TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6285, AN ACT RAISING THE AGE OF A CHILD WITH RESPECT TO JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit organization based at the University of Connecticut Law School. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. Through our TeamChild Project, the Center represents individual youth in the juvenile justice system (referred by their public defenders, probation officers and other service providers) concerning appropriate educational placements and access to mental health care.

We urge you to pass Raised Bill No. 6285, *An Act Raising the Age of a Child With Respect to Juvenile Court Jurisdiction*. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction is certain to have a positive impact on youth, their families and on our communities. In Connecticut, a staggering number of youth are processed through the adult court system. Connecticut's practice of treating youth aged just 16 and 17 as adults is not in step with what research tells us about these youth today. This practice cannot lead to positive outcomes. It has been proven that adolescent brains are not fully developed, and as a result, adolescents have impaired judgment and reasoning. Unfortunately, age appropriate services available to these youth in the juvenile system are not similarly available to them in the adult system and instead of receiving needed rehabilitation services, our youth learn how to become criminals. Moreover, there is no evidence that sending 16 and 17 year olds to adult courts will increase the public's safety, and for the youth involved in the adult system, their criminal record will negatively affect their future employment capability. **It is imperative that Connecticut not delay, but act now, to pass this legislation for our youth.**

The Juvenile Justice Planning and Implementation Committee has conducted a careful examination of exactly what it will take to implement the raise in age. Much data has been presented to the committee and many experts have testified. The data presented has been more than sufficient to make a very strong case for raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction.

Through the TeamChild Project, we interact with numerous youth who have become involved with the juvenile justice system. If the youth are under the age of sixteen, they may access a multitude of services including, but not limited to, substance abuse treatment, Multi-Dimensional Family Therapy (MDFT), Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services (IICAPS), Family Functional Therapy (FFT), Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), mentoring and extended day treatment. These services will not be accessible for the same youth, facing the same or similar charges once they turn sixteen. This makes no sense. For youth involved in the juvenile justice system, improving outcomes is essential. Interestingly, a large number of the youth we serve through the TeamChild Project have



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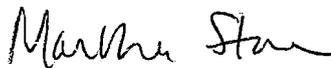
been arrested at their schools or charged with school related offenses. The Connecticut legislature has seen fit to require the presence of children in our public schools until they reach the age of 18. Ironically, upon arrest at school or for school related charges, these 16 and 17 year old children are processed in adult courts. This practice is skewed, and knowing what we know now, is wholly unreasonable. The legislature should seize this opportunity and pass this legislation. By passing this bill, our state can move toward creating a balance that makes sense, is research based, and finally rectifies the current incongruence in the treatment of our youth. **The legislature should raise the age of our youth to age 18 in our juvenile court systems by passing Raised Bill No. 6285, *An Act Raising the Age of a Child With Respect to Juvenile Court Jurisdiction.***

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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