

Thank you. Greetings Honorable Senators and Representatives, Members of the Committee. My name is Christopher Francis and I am a student at the UCONN. School of Social Work and a former Correction Officer who have had the opportunity to work with 16 and 17 year olds in prison.

- I am here in regards to H.B. No. 6386 "AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION."
- I urge you to reject the proposal to delay raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction on the grounds that a delay would deepen the psychological harm the penal system is causing to our 16 and 17 year olds in prison.
- In the landmark case, *Roper v. Simmons*, the Supreme Court outlined some general differences between juveniles and adults who commit crimes. The justices expressed that (1) a lack of maturity and underdeveloped sense of responsibility occur more often in youths and are more understandable among the young, (2) Juveniles are impressionable and susceptible to negative peer pressure, which is a natural phenomenon experienced by socialized teenagers, and (3) the Court noted that juveniles of these ages are traveling that critical road where character is being developed and internal moral judgment are being formed. It would, therefore, be irresponsible to hold responsible juveniles of these ages to the same threshold that we hold adult offenders.
- I have seen the impact adult prison life has had on these children. Allowing juveniles to remain in adult prison is a serious breach of some of our basic values.
- From a policy perspective, nothing could be more nonsensical than incorporating 16 and 17 year olds in adult prison. Studies show that recidivism rates among juveniles housed in adult prisons are significantly higher than those confined in juvenile facilities.
- The cold reality is that there is a culture among the incarcerated that teaches and promotes unlawful behavior. To subject our juveniles to this environment deplores our sense of responsibility and good judgment.
- I have met with many of these children who consistently and collectively express feelings of anxiety and despondence due to adult prison exposure.
- I know the Department of Correction enforces strict laws surrounding the segregation of juveniles from "general population." This practice of segregation quite frankly amounts to a prison within a prison for these juveniles.
- Further, as a consequence to this isolation, their recreational activities are limited, their freedom of movement within their physical environment is severely diminished, and their allotted meal time is rigidly enforced.
- While these may seem like minor issues to the free society, recreational time in prison environment often means the difference between one's sanity and insanity, sadness and happiness and ultimately could mean the difference between life and death. I know this from my experience as a correction officer.
- My plea today is grounded in a sense of compassion and doing what is right and makes sense. Do not delay this important transition. Please raise the age criteria for juvenile offenders as scheduled. Thank you.