

Testimony of Thomas Grodecki
In Support of Raised Bill No. 417

Good Morning,

My name is Tom Grodecki. I am a retired Hartford Police Officer, currently employed as a Judicial Marshal. I am the Supervising Judicial Marshal at the Juvenile Court, 920 Broad Street, Hartford, CT. I began my career with the Hartford Police Department in 1968 and have been in law enforcement for 45 years.

I am sure you will hear much testimony today regarding brain development and it's affect on adolescent criminal behavior. Everyone recognizes in one way or another that brain development is essential to ones ability to accept responsibility. We require kids to stay in school at least until their 16th birthday and there is currently talk of moving that to 18. We allow young people to train for and get their drivers license at 16. You can join the military and vote at 18. These are not just random numbers. The sole purpose of these age limits is to insure that the young person has matured sufficiently to understand the awesome responsibility these privileges require.

The researchers will explain how the frontal lobe is the last part of the brain to developed to maturity and that this is the part of the brain that is responsible for logic, for impulse control and the ability to recognize accountability and responsibility. The research has established that the frontal lobe continues to grow and developed until the early 20's. I have read much on the subject but my life experience as a career police officer and judicial marshal has served to reinforce in my mind how very accurate this research is.

I have told these stories so many times to so many people because they have affected me so deeply and because I wish everyone could understand how important it is for us to not just punish criminal behavior by adolescents but to give them the services necessary to help them understand and change that behavior. When we hold 14 year olds accountable in the adult system for crimes they committed as adolescents, we scar them for life with a criminal record that will inhabit them for all their life. I am not opposed to longer sentencing for youthful offenders, but I firmly believe that crimes committed by kids under 18, should be dealt with in the juvenile court system so at some point their record is cleared and they get the services necessary to change that behavior. Incarceration is punishment, it is not corrective as the name, "Department of Corrections," might suggest.

One several occasions I responded to complaints of shots fired, man down. Upon my arrival I found a 14 or 15 year old youth, shot to death, that I had previously held in my arms when he was a child and I responded to a complaint at his families house. When the shooter was identified and arrested, he too was a young man I had held as a child when I responded to a complaint at his families house. Each time I realized that the deceased youth was just as capable to act on impulse and commit the very crime that had taken his life. Not because he was a born killer, not because he thought out or planned these acts, but because he acted on impulse. Had these kids had more time, more life experience, more intervention in the early life, they would be incapable of the offense. Brain development matters, early intervention and services matters and can prevent these acts, prosecution as an adult only serves to justify our failure to have intervened earlier and provide the necessary services. Now one young man is dead and another rots away in prison. Is society any better off for this?

There are countless other examples, and I wish I had the time and opportunity to address the committee but I want everyone to know, that based on my experiences as a law enforcement officer for 45 years I can say without hesitation or reservation that I firmly believe that juvenile offenders and society are best served when juvenile offenders are processed in the juvenile justice system.