

Dear Lawmakers,

First, I would like to thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony and the testimony of our public on such a serious topic. I am in full support of H.B. 5221, which provides an opportunity for review of extensive sentences of persons who were under eighteen years of age when they committed their crimes.

As a social worker, with a psychology background, I fully recognize in GREAT detail, what it means to be an adolescent. An adolescent is considered as a stage of human development between the ages of 11-20 years of age. The life stage of development is labeled *Identity vs. Role Confusion*; according to the well-respected psychosocial developmental theorist, Erickson. At this stage of development adolescents try to develop a sense of who they are and where they are going in life and can become confused on their identity. Meaning, adolescents have a lot of peer pressure from outside their home and it is intensified by the demands being made on them in the home. This factor should be reason to take a *second look* at persons in our correctional system, whom many of have fell victim to the peer pressures of their environment; including family This sense of confusion, on behalf of such adolescents, may have resulted in poor decision making, subsequently providing the outcome to be decades of punishment! Punishment for adolescents in general, should be put in place by adults to teach the adolescent to mature and grow from the experience in a humane amount of time, instead of extensive, excessive and unreasonable amount of time. By passing this bill, you are allowing these inmates an *opportunity* to prove their rehabilitation, their growth and maturation.

The juvenile justice system was originally created for children because it was obvious that adolescents and adults *are* different cognitively and therefore, should be treated accordingly. There are statistics that show juvenile recidivism was dramatically reduced in the United States at a point in our history because social workers became a major component of the juvenile justice system. This nationwide effort demonstrated that juveniles are capable of rehabilitation without excessive incarceration. Social workers intervened by giving attention to each juveniles mitigating factors by exploring their bio- psychosocial functions. Social workers also became more affluent in the communities and created such programs as; *Motivation For Youth* (MYF).

The question is relatively simple, what would happen if we began to have an adolescents decide the fate of other adolescents? The clear answer is because the adolescent's brain can't fully understand the extent of the crime being presented and/nor can the adolescent comprehend all the legal terminology. Yet, according to our current law, a child who commits a crime is *instantly* an adult who can fully comprehend plea deals, legal terms and apparently what exactly life sentences without the possibility of parole assumes. Who can truly fathom the idea of a 30 or 60 plus year sentence as adolescent???

I understand that we *must* be in compliance with the Supreme Court and that this "resolution" does not guarantee release rather, an opportunity for such persons to display their rehabilitation and maturation. However, I believe that this "*Opportunity*", is all many of these individuals want.

Again, I thank you for your time,  
Aurelia Price

*District #95*