

**Testimony in Favor of SB 796, AAC Lengthy Sentences for Crimes
Committed by a Child or Youth and Sentencing of a Child or Youth
Convicted of Certain Felony Offenses**

My name is Amber Smith and I am writing in favor of SB 796, which provides parole eligibility rules tailored for juveniles, and eliminates mandatory life-without-parole sentences for juveniles and allows judges to consider youth-related factors in sentencing juveniles transferred to adult court.

As a teenager I relate closely to this bill and what it stands for. Surrounded by my peers of similar ages constantly, a certain line of thinking is evident. Emotions are what mainly drive decisions and the consequences of actions are a mere afterthought. This simply sounds like reckless behavior by delinquents who have no respect for authority, but I've found it has happened with even the most well-behaved teenager at the top of their class or a student body president.

Teenagers can be impulsive. Sometimes the lines get blurred and mistakes are an unfortunate side-effect. This is true for all adolescents for the simple fact that our brains are still in development. The parts of the brain responsible for more control, controlling impulses, and planning ahead are among the last to mature.

Adolescents who experience more emotional strain on a constant basis are even more subject to acting rashly. Many of these adolescents who are facing time have come from environments that are toxic and they can't remove themselves from the situation because they have no place to go. They're a ticking time bomb, so to speak, and it's only a matter of time before their emotions lash out in a horrid way if they don't receive any help or guidance.

In the Supreme Court case *Miller v. Alabama*, Justice Elena Kagan wrote for the majority of the court "that mandatory life without parole for those under age of 18 at the time of their crime violates the 8th Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishments." Age is a factor that needs to be taken into account for sentencing especially since there has been extensive scientific research shows that children's brains are not yet fully developed. This gives the adolescent who committed a serious crime when they were young significantly greater chance than adult to rehabilitate.

Denying them parole, and sentence them to life in prison would be denying them a great chance for a new life. A chance to become a productive member of our society.