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My name is Julian Ford. I am a professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I am the Director of the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice within the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and a senior academic fellow with the Child Health and Development Institute. I have led or co-authored a series of research and policy studies concerning mental health and traumatic stress services for youths in the juvenile justice system.

I would like to express my strong support for SB 796, the so-called Second Look Bill, which would address lengthy sentences for crimes committed by minors.

Adolescents differ from adults in many ways. They tend to be more impulsive, more influenced by peers and more likely to take risks. The pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain that helps us exercise judgment and weigh the consequences of our actions, is not fully developed until well into our twenties, whereas areas in the “emotional brain” that trigger stress reactions are fully developed by adolescence.. Thus youth are developmentally susceptible to having their brains in effect hijacked by stress reactions that interfere with the most basic requirement of proactive decision making and self-control: the ability to stop and think..

From this biological fact, we can conclude two things:



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1. Young people are not as culpable for their actions when they are under stress or experiencing a sense of threat as adults are.
2. The behaviors and ways of thinking of an adolescent are not necessarily predictive of how the same person will act and think in adulthood.

Connecticut has recognized these realities as it reformed its juvenile justice system.

For example, in raising the age of adult jurisdiction to 18 for most crimes, the legislature was guided by brain development research. Yet, our state has still failed to pass legislation to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's Miller decision, banning mandatory life without parole sentences for juveniles. – even though the bill has garnered bipartisan supporters and is the product of a recommendation developed by a commission that included a prosecutor and a victim advocate. Although these sentences are based on extremely serious crimes and actions that cannot be justified or excused, they also fail to take into account the potential role of lapses in judgment and responsibility that in many cases are not inevitably repeated and that can be addressed through rehabilitation but may become chronic with incarceration .

I would refer you to the amicus brief that the American Psychological Association submitted to the court when it heard the Miller case:

Nor does the scientific literature provide any reason to distinguish between homicide and non-homicide convictions in this regard. In either case, the signature qualities of adolescence reduce juvenile's culpability and increase their capacity for change. Condemning an immature, vulnerable, and not-yet-



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fully-formed adolescent to live every remaining day of his life in prison – whatever his crime – is thus a constitutionally disproportionate punishment.

Indeed, even adolescents who pose a significant risk to the community cannot be reliably predicted to pose a risk as adults. In an often-cited study, researchers followed young adolescents who scored in the top quintile on a juvenile psychopathy measure. Only 16 were assessed as psychopathic at age 24.¹ Another study found no association between juvenile murder convictions and persistent anti-social personality.²

The bill before you does not – and should not – simply assume that young people who commit serious crimes will outgrow their behavior. It requires them to meet a high standard of proof before a parole board, an even higher standard than the state imposes on those who committed crimes as adults. It also provides a path for meaningful rehabilitation rather than fostering a sense of hopelessness that can lead to a deepening of antisocial beliefs and behavior patterns.

Nor do I submit that because of adolescents' diminished culpability they should not be held accountable for their behavior. Second Look requires young people to serve the majority of their sentence before there will be any parole eligibility.

¹ Donald Lynam et al., *Longitudinal Evidence That Psychopathy Scores in Early Adolescence Predict Adult Psychopathy*, 116 J. Abnormal Psychol. 155, 160 (2007).

² Rolf Loeber & David Farrington, *Young Homicide Offenders and Victims: Risk Factors, Prediction, and Prevention from Childhood* (2011)



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My point is simply this: Reform and rehabilitation are possible for adolescents, even those who have committed serious crimes. It is not only possible; it is highly likely. Thus among the hundreds of prisoners who would be affected by this bill, the science suggests that many could be safely released into the community. To deny someone even the chance to demonstrate rehabilitation after being convicted as adolescent flies in the face of a strong body of knowledge about human development.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.