

-YALE COLLEGE- DEMOCRATS

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345 Temple St. G20

Testimony of Yasmin Eriksson
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In favor: S.B. 18
 An Act Concerning A Second Chance Society

I am 18. I am a freshman in college. I do not have the legal ability to buy alcohol or to rent a car. I got my license a year ago. I do not know how to file taxes, balance a budget, or pay mortgage. Yet I am old enough to go to adult prison, with no chance of my criminal record being expunged.

The other day, a student went up to our juvenile justice campaign table and told me he saw his record sealed in court at age 18 due to "a stupid mistake." I have had friends who have been incarcerated before for marijuana usage and other misdemeanors. According to recent neuroscience studies, the human brain does not fully develop and reach maturation until age 25. An 18-year-old's ability to assess risks and make wise choices is therefore very different than that of a 21-year-old.

Yet, in spite of the scientific evidence, harsh juvenile sentencing statutes give young adults little room for mistakes. If tried as an adult, their criminal record will last a lifetime and affect their ability to achieve employment in the often-discriminatory job market. Studies show that unemployment increases rates of recidivism.

In addition to reforming juvenile sentencing, S.B. 18 calls for the implementation of risk assessment training, mental health programs, and rehabilitation centers across the state. If the criminal record is not permanent and there are better opportunities for rehabilitation within prison, young adults will be more likely to secure employment and successfully reintegrate into society. The bill would benefit black youth, who are disproportionately affected by harsh sentencing laws. Black youth are incarcerated at six times the rate that their white counterparts are. Equal sentencing would reduce the jail population in the U.S. by as much as 50%, which would ease the financial burden of housing thousands of inmates from the state and increase tax revenue.

2/3^{ds} of those who have been imprisoned will reoffend. Why is that? According to studies, adult prison is not nearly as rehabilitative as originally intended. If we want to lessen our punitive emphasis within the criminal justice system, we need to give young people the opportunities to grow beyond their mistakes. The passing of S.B. 18 would make Connecticut the first state to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to twenty, setting a national precedent. The bill would ultimately give us youth the chance to clean our slates and prove that we can be law abiding and productive members of society.