



Testimony of
The Connecticut Parent Teacher Association
Before the Legislature's Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, March 23, 2016
11:00 AM, Room 2C, Legislative Office Building

Re: SB 18 An Act Concerning A Second Chance Society

Good morning, my name is Marne Usher and I speak here today representing the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association (CT PTA) and its over 40,000 members.

CT PTA supports SB18 AN ACT CONCERNING A SECOND CHANCE SOCIETY.

PTA has a long history of advocating for policies to prevent children and youth from entering the juvenile justice system and protecting those currently in the system. In 1898 National PTA passed a resolution supporting the creation of separate juvenile courts and probation systems to protect children from being incarcerated with adults. By 1925, as a result of the efforts of PTA members and other child advocates, all but two states had a separate juvenile court system.

This legislation would make our state a leader in juvenile justice reforms by raising the age of the juvenile justice system's jurisdiction from age 17 to age 20 and providing a second chance for low risk young adult offenders to achieve their true potential.

Connecticut's recent legislation raising the juvenile jurisdiction age resulted in statewide arrests of young people in Connecticut declining dramatically. Between 2008 and 2014, the number of 15 to 19 year olds arrested in our state fell by 54%. The number of 17 year olds arrested in that same time period was reduced by 60%!

Recidivism is generally most pronounced among younger offenders and the age of an offender at the time of their first incarceration is a strong predictor of subsequent incarceration. Fewer younger offenders entering the system and beginning a life of crime means significantly less crime in the future.

Current developmental science tells us that “the parts of the brain responsible for more ‘top-down’ control, controlling impulses, and planning ahead—the hallmarks of adult behavior—are among the last to mature.” Youth are fundamentally different from adults because of their immature brain development, and their weaker impulse control and reasoning abilities. Indeed, these exact factors led the U.S. Supreme Court a few years ago to conclude that youth should be treated differently by the criminal justice system because of their developmental differences. In that decision, Justice Kennedy, who wrote for the majority, noted the fact that youth have more potential to reform their behavior and be rehabilitated than adults.

As a parent I can tell you that I watched my child do some incredibly stupid things in his “college age” years. He didn’t do them because we hadn’t taught him better, we certainly had, or because he didn’t know the difference between right and wrong, he certainly did, BUT because he was of that age where he thought he was largely invincible and bad things only happened to other people. When he got caught up in the moment he didn’t yet have the ability to step back and analyze all of his options before taking action. Like so many in that age group he didn’t look before he leapt. He may have had an adult body but he didn’t yet have an adult brain. Fortunately, he is now a healthy and productive adult who survived his “youthful indiscretions”. Not every young adult is that lucky but they all deserve the opportunity to lead productive lives and society needs their skills and talents.

CT PTA believes that all students need the educational and emotional supports necessary to become productive adults. CT PTA supports family and community-based alternatives to incarceration of youth, especially for low level offenses and encourages positive school discipline policies that keep students in school and out of the justice system.

About Connecticut PTA

Connecticut PTA comprises over 40,000 members consisting of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools and well-being of children. PTA is a registered 501(c) (3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education, children’s health and child welfare. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health and welfare of children and youth.

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