

Cavana Carey

Testimony in favor of Governor's Bill 18, AAC A Second Chance Society

My name is Cavana Carey. I am a high school junior and I am testifying in favor of Governor's Bill No. 18, which, among its provisions, allows young adults to stay in juvenile detention centers until the age of 21 rather than being transferred to an adult prison at the age of just 18. This bill also allows the offenders to have a chance to be employed and gain an education once released from the facility.

As a young adult I can agree on the fact that many teens and young adults make inappropriate choices without giving those actions a second thought. But should the government punish these youths for their inappropriate actions to the point where they are serving a long time in adult prison? I believe not. Raising the age of juveniles will decrease the amount of inmates in prisons. Connecticut's prison population has been reduced to its lowest level in 17 years with 4,000 fewer inmates than in 2008- a 20% decrease."<sup>1</sup> Let's continue this positive trend by giving young adults the tools they need to rehabilitate and become productive members of society. Governor Malloy recently stated, " We need to become a society of permanent progress, not permanent punishment."<sup>2</sup> Placing young adults in an adult prison is not beneficial to their long term well-being and that of our communities. In my opinion, young men and women placed in adult prison are focused more on learning how to survive rather than on making progress in learning from the offenses that they've committed. When juveniles and young adults are incarcerated, the goal should be rehabilitation -- so they do not return.

Punishing young adults by placing them in state prisons affects their futures. By this I mean that once they're released from these state prisons it is hard for them to find jobs and

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"Expanding second chance society" Governor Malloy, Press conference, Connecticut law review symposium, November 6, 2015  
[http://portal.ct.gov/Departments\\_and\\_Agencies/Office\\_of\\_the\\_Governor/Press\\_Room/Press\\_Releases/2015/11-2015/Gov\\_Malloy\\_Launches\\_Conversation\\_on\\_Expanding\\_Second\\_Chance\\_Society\\_Initiatives\\_in\\_Connecticut/](http://portal.ct.gov/Departments_and_Agencies/Office_of_the_Governor/Press_Room/Press_Releases/2015/11-2015/Gov_Malloy_Launches_Conversation_on_Expanding_Second_Chance_Society_Initiatives_in_Connecticut/)

<sup>2</sup>. "Expanding second chance society" Governor Malloy, Press conference, Connecticut law review symposium, November 6, 2015 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2014/10/13/teenagers-in-adult-prisons-are-twice-as-likely-to-commit-suicide-infographic/#5006c1d12788>

homes. When these 18-20 year olds experience these hardships they're being permanently punished, and with a permanent punishment there is often no room for progression. Furthermore, reconviction rates among this population are particularly high; nearly 69% of sentenced 18-20 year olds are reconvicted within two years of release.<sup>3</sup>

Placing young adults in these institutions may put their health at risk. Young adults are not mentally or physically equipped to be incarcerated in a state prison. This will cause them to be intellectually and emotionally scarred in their futures. I argue that in general, adolescents can make a rational decisions and not really know and appreciate the difference between right and wrong. However, particularly when confronted with stressful or emotional decisions, young adults are more likely to act impulsively, without fully understanding or analyzing the consequences of their actions.<sup>4</sup> Even though they are technically adults, this population's minds are still developing and they are still learning from their mistakes.

One way to think about it is a kind of competition or balance between two different brain systems: A system that impels young adults to seek out rewards and go for novelty and excitement, sensation seeking, and a system that really puts the brakes on impulses. What we now understand about the adolescent brain is that both of these systems are changing during the course of adolescence. The reward seeking system is becoming more easily aroused, particularly during early adolescence, which makes kids seek rewards. The braking system is still developing very, very slowly and it's not fully mature until people are well into their 20s.<sup>5</sup> If these young adults are not mentally or physically developed, it should not be suitable to punish them as if they are fully developed and mature adults. We want to teach to our young adults right from wrong. It is not necessary to give them a punishment that will result in them serving a large part of their lives in a prison due to the fact that a lot of these offenders do eventually return. "High rates of recidivism mean that many youth, once in the prison system, will stay there for significant portions of their lives. Up to one-third of incarcerated youth return to jail or prison

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<sup>3</sup> "Young adult male prisoners: a short report" Report, Monica Lloyd, October 2006  
[https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/Young\\_adult\\_male\\_prisoners.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/Young_adult_male_prisoners.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "Experts link teen brain maturity, juvenile crime" Malcolm Ritter, abc news, Associated press: New York  
<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=3943187&page=1>

<sup>5</sup> "6 facts about crime and adolescent brain" Emily Kaiser, MPR news, Novemeber 14, 2012  
<http://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/11/15/daily-circuit-juvenile-offenders-brain-development>

within a few years after release.”<sup>6</sup> These young adults are going into prisons and serving a large portion of their lives in here, and eventually returning as opposed to not coming back and learning their lesson from their offenses. In a way we are in fact setting these young adults up for failure. By placing these young adults in a state prison we are not only putting them in an institution for a substantial amount of time, we are also taking them away from their community, their friends, and more importantly their families. Is sending 18 through 20 year olds to state prison going to rehabilitate them in a positive manner? Will these offenders return to their homes and make permanent progress, or will they return to prison for a permanent punishment?

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<sup>6</sup> “2015 opportunity agenda: ensuring justice in perception and reality,” Recommendations on Reforming the Justice System’s Treatment of Minors, Announced on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/2015-opportunity-agenda-ensuring-justice-perception-and-reality-0>