

Testimony on Raised S.B. 503

Good evening members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is **Deivone M. Tanksley Sr.**, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in support of Raised Bill SB■503, which concerns sentencing and parole eligibility for individuals who committed offenses when they were under the age of twenty■six.

I'm here today not just as a community leader, but as someone who grew up in the environments many of these young people come from.

When people talk about crime, they often focus on the moment of the offense. But what we don't always talk about are the environments that shaped those moments.

I grew up in a neighborhood where survival was a daily lesson.

One moment that stayed with me my entire life happened when I was about thirteen years old. A drug dealer beat my older brother because he didn't sell all the drugs he was given. I remember them bringing him into our home. There were men standing in our living room with guns in their socks and pistols in their hands. My brother was bleeding. My mother was crying.

And they told her, "Call whoever you need to call—your church, your family, your community—but we need our money."

I remember sitting there with my little brother watching everything unfold. And strangely... we weren't shocked. It felt normal. That was the environment many families were living in.

Growing up like that puts young people in constant **fight■or■flight**. Poverty, trauma, violence, and instability shape the way a developing brain responds to the world.

I know that personally.

At **12 years old** I was in a detention center. At **15** I was placed in a residential home. At **17** I was at NYI. And by **20 years old** I was in Northern Correctional Institution.

So when we talk about young people in the justice system, I'm not speaking from theory. I'm speaking from lived experience.

And today we're still seeing the results of that.

Right now there are teenagers serving 30, 40, and even 50 years in prison because they killed another teenager. Two young lives gone forever — one in the grave and one behind bars.

When people hear those cases, the first question is often, "How could they do something like that?"

But the deeper question we should be asking is: **what environments created those outcomes?**

This bill recognizes something that science and experience both tell us — that young people are still developing well into their twenties.

That doesn't excuse harm. And it doesn't erase the pain that victims and families experience.

But what it does is allow the justice system to recognize that **people can grow, mature, and transform over time.**

Many of the young people who enter prison at 18, 19, or 20 are not the same people ten or twenty years later.

Some gain education. Some become mentors. Some dedicate their lives to helping younger people avoid the mistakes they made.

This bill simply creates the opportunity for those individuals to be evaluated for parole — not automatically released — but reviewed based on who they have become.

Because the truth is, many young people who commit serious mistakes are not born broken.

Many were responding to environments they never chose.

And when we recognize that, and create systems that balance accountability with the possibility of growth, we create a justice system that is both responsible and humane.

Thank you for your time and consideration.