



Citizens  
for  
Juvenile  
Justice



## Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction to Include 18 – 20 Year Olds Statement of Support

**Citizens for Juvenile Justice, in collaboration with Roca, UTEC, and the other organizations and individuals listed below support raising the age of the Massachusetts juvenile justice system to include 18 - 20 year-olds. This reform will decrease crime; hold young people accountable in developmentally appropriate systems; and benefit the Massachusetts economy.**

### Why change our approach to emerging adults?

#### 1) What we are doing now does not work.

- **Massachusetts spends the most money locking up young people in the adult system and gets the worst outcomes.** This age group has the highest recidivism rate of any in the Commonwealth.
- **We're making things worse.** Most young people "age out" of offending by their late twenties, particularly with developmentally appropriate interventions.
- **Exposure to toxic environments like adult jails and prisons can actually increase offending.**

#### 2) This reform will decrease crime.

- **Young adults are highly amenable to rehabilitation.**
- **Their development is influenced positively or negatively by their environment.**
- Trying and sentencing 18 – 20 year-olds in the adult system *undermines* public safety and reduces the likelihood of positive outcomes. Adult jail and prison criminalizes.
- Holding emerging adults accountable in the juvenile system would lower recidivism and prevent deeper criminal involvement, improving outcomes for both young people and community safety.

#### 3) Young people will be held accountable.

- **The most serious crimes will continue to be eligible for adult sentences.** Youth 14 and over who are accused of murder are automatically transferred to adult court. Those accused of other serious crimes can be indicted as "youthful offenders," which carries the possibility of an adult sentence.
- With specially trained judges, juvenile probation officers, an experienced youth corrections agency, and procedures that protect the privacy of young people, the juvenile system has a much greater chance of ensuring successful outcomes for 18 – 20 year olds than the adult system.
- The juvenile system typically imposes more supervision. In addition to being held accountable, and confined when necessary, young people in the juvenile system must also attend school and participate in other rehabilitative programs (e.g. mental and behavioral health programming, substance abuse, anger management).
- Massachusetts already has young adult programs that are national models such as Roca and UTEC that can manage this population.
- Some victims' groups support restorative justice that holds offenders accountable; this is more available in the juvenile system.

**4) Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction makes developmental sense.** Research confirms what many adults (especially parents) know: Developments in the fields of neurobiology and developmental psychology show that 18- to 20-year-olds are in a distinct developmental stage, in between children and fully mature adults. Given the opportunity, most will mature normally, reaching the developmental bridges (e.g., steady work and marriage) that will support them to “age out” of wrong doing.

**5) Massachusetts already recognizes emerging adults as a distinct population:** child welfare, healthcare, education, labor and other state agencies have created dedicated policies and programs to support young adults' transition to independent adulthood.

**6) Building upon our success.**

- Massachusetts recently demonstrated its ability to implement substantial reforms in the justice system by the highly successful absorption of 17 year-olds into the juvenile justice system in 2013. Since then, juvenile crime has declined by 34%, and after the initial impact of the legislation, the number of youth in Massachusetts state juvenile facilities has continued to decline. The recidivism rate for formerly incarcerated young people is lower for those committed to DYS compared to those incarcerated in the adults system (**26% vs. 55%** reconviction rate).
- The Department of Youth Services currently serves certain youth up to age 21, is familiar with the educational and treatment needs of this cohort of young people, and is recognized for the work already being done with emerging adults up to age 21 in its care and custody.
- With juvenile crime at historic lows, the system now has the capacity to absorb 18 – 20 year-olds.

**7) Massachusetts' economy will benefit.**

- Because the juvenile justice system is specifically designed to deal with young people, it does so more effectively, and cost-effectively, than the adult system.
- By including most 18 – 20 year-olds in a more effective rehabilitative system and utilizing less costly community-based services already available for juveniles, the Commonwealth can save money.
- **An educated workforce is one of the state's best economic assets.** Mass. employment growth will drop by more than half next year (NE Economic Partnership) due to worker shortages as baby boomers retire. We need new workers to fill the gap.
- Massachusetts needs people to join the workforce, serve in the armed forces, and obtain professional licenses. **An adult record can bar people from employment, housing, and many more opportunities.**
- **Because the criminal justice system impacts young people of color at higher rates, the decrease in opportunity hits minority communities especially hard.**
- This reform **gives young people a better chance to grow up to contribute to their communities**, thus helping to prevent intergenerational poverty.

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## Sign on as a Campaign Endorser!

Signing on behalf of an **organization**?

Signing as an **individual**?

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

*If you do not have the ability to sign on to the campaign for your organization, please bring this Statement of Support to the attention of those in your organization who can sign on.*

**Please return completed form to Sana Fadel at CfJJ: [sanafadel@cfjj.org](mailto:sanafadel@cfjj.org)**