

Ronald D. Simpson-Bey
Director of Outreach and Alumni Engagement
JustLeadershipUSA
ronald@jlusa.org
810-293-5739

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Testimony in Support of SB 256
Regards Sentencing Offenders Under 18 When Committed Offense
Senate Judiciary Committee

Greetings Chairman Eklund, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Ronald D. Simpson-Bey and I thank you for allowing and considering my testimony in support of SB 256. I am a formerly incarcerated citizen who served 27-years in the Michigan Department of Corrections before the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed my conviction and I was subsequently released.

On Father's Day 2001 I was sitting in a prison cell waiting for a visit from my son and three daughters. The visit never happened because my son, who was 21-years old at the time, was shot and killed by a 14-year old juvenile. Despite this, my son's mother and I did not want our son's killer to spend the rest of his life in prison. We don't believe in the concept of an eye for an eye.

We recognize that even though he committed a horrible crime, the boy who killed our son was still a child. We wanted him to be processed in the juvenile system, which was set up specifically for children. We wanted him tried there and held there after his conviction to prepare him for release.

Research has proven what many parents already know: Children are still developing and possess tremendous capacity for change. We also know that they do not have the same capacity as adults to resist pressure from peers and adults, think through the long-term consequences of their actions or remove themselves from dangerous situations.

It is now 19-years later and the child who killed my son is now a young man. He has grown into a productive man all because he had a second chance, which is all that any of us could want. Together, we can be sure that more young people get the chance they need and deserve.

We don't make our communities safe by creating artificial lines between "victims" and "offenders." That's why I advocated for fair treatment for the teen who killed my son, and why we must insist on healing the harms suffered by both sides of the crime in order to heal our communities. Please lend your support in the passage of SB 256 and let's put the humanity back into being human.