



September 1, 2020

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this very important issue. The Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is pleased to support SB 256, which will ensure that youth under the age of 18 cannot be sentenced to life without a meaningful opportunity for release and a second chance. This critical legislation presents not only an opportunity for redemption and rehabilitation for justice-involved children, but also for better use of taxpayer dollars without putting public safety at risk.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice is a multi-state organization that aims to advance criminal justice reform and effective approaches to public safety in states across the country. We bring together diverse crime survivors via our flagship project, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, to advance policies that help crime victims and together we promote strategies to stop cycles of crime, reduce costly reliance on incarceration, increase trauma recovery services, and build healthy communities.

The Ohio General Assembly has taken important steps to stop the cycles of crime by prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment, specifically with the passage of SB 66 in 2017 which elevated rehabilitation and judicial discretion. SB 256 continues this commitment to rehabilitation as a critical public safety strategy. Allowing people who have committed serious crimes before the age of 18 to be considered for parole based on appropriate factors, rather than spend the rest of their lives in prison, will allow for the prioritization of limited resources into public safety priorities that better serve families and communities.

Sentencing children to life without parole runs counter to an abundance of scientific research which tells us that young people's brains continue to develop into their early to mid-twenties, and thus are developmentally unsuited to the same treatment as adults in the criminal justice system.¹ Given this, twenty-three states and the District of Columbia have banned juvenile life-without-parole sentences² and recognized that youth should be granted the opportunity to demonstrate growth, maturity, and potential to productively and safely rejoin their communities. In addition to aligning with best practices in public safety, SB 256 makes fiscal sense as well. Incarceration is incredibly costly, especially for young people given no opportunity for release. Research from the Justice Policy Institute and National Center for Victims of Crime has shown that people who are victims of crime committed by youth often prefer they be held accountable through interventions based in the community, rather than behind bars. Resources spent on a

¹Coalition for Juvenile Justice. (2006) ["Applying Research to Practice Brief: What Are the Implications of Adolescent Brain Development for Juvenile Justice?"](#)

² The Sentencing Project. (2020) ["Juvenile Life Without Parole: An Overview."](#)

lifetime of incarceration can and should be redirected to support rehabilitation and prevention efforts proven to be effective.

Finally, ASJ understands the critical role of addressing trauma in stopping cycles of crime. For that reason, we are grateful to see this recognized as one of the factors SB 256 lays out for judges to consider when sentencing children. Factors such as history of trauma, family home environment, and the way family and peer pressure may have impacted conduct are crucial considerations when determining what is best for a child.

ASJ supports SB 256, and we urge you to continue to prioritize rehabilitation over punishment by giving young people a second chance at a future with their families and communities.

As always, if we can be of further assistance, we are happy to do so.

Respectfully,

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