

December 1, 2020

To: House Criminal Justice Committee

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee,

I am writing in support of SB256. Children who have been incarcerated and sentenced to life without parole deserve a second chance to be members of society. This is not just my opinion, it is science. Although scientists and behavioral specialists from around the world agree that children's brains are not fully developed until well into their 20's, two of the most prominent researchers on the subject, Harvard Medical School and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provide the definitive science behind the research.

Harvard Medical School recently noted of teenagers, "They can often recognize risks, but incomplete development of brain mechanisms related to modulation of impulsive behavior reduces their tendency to heed those risks." In other words, kids may know when something is a risk, but their brain and thinking patterns aren't developed enough to understand consequences and proper actions the way that a fully mature adult brain does.

A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report found that, "Adolescent brains are malleable. This ability, known as neuroplasticity, allows adolescents' brains to grow, and even heal from earlier traumas, through experiences such as trying new things, making decisions, learning, and making memories." In simple terms, Adolescent brains are still developing and can only fully develop through the natural process of aging and maturing.

SB256 should be passed based on the science and understanding that the juvenile brain is not fully developed at the time of committing a crime. These men and women deserve an opportunity to rejoin society as mature adults, not remain in prison for crimes that were committed before they fully understood the consequences of their actions. All juveniles who have been sentenced as adults to life without parole deserve a second chance in life.

Passing SB256 will give these juveniles hope and goals to work toward earning their freedom.

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