



## Support HB 632/SB 506: Juvenile Age to 18 Juvenile Justice System Demands More than Adult System

North Carolina’s current policy of handling 16- and 17-year-olds in the adult criminal justice system is counterproductive. For most youthful offenders, the adult system provides nothing more than a slap on the wrist. The juvenile system, on the other hand, demands much more from offenders and families.

	<b>In the Juvenile System:</b>	<b>In the Adult System:</b>
<b>Parent Involvement</b>	Parent/guardian must be involved. Youth released from detention center <i>only</i> to parent/guardian. Youth have no right to pretrial release, no right to bond.	Parent/guardian need not be notified. Youth can make bail and leave county jail on own recognizance.
<b>Education</b>	Youth must attend school or get GED.	No education requirement.
<b>Age-Appropriate Services, Treatment and Punishment</b>	Youth receive assessments, have frequent contact with court counselors, and report regularly for rehabilitative services. Youth and families often receive court-ordered evidence-based therapies: counseling, training, mentoring, tutoring, and parenting skills. Youth with mental health and substance abuse issues receive intensive services. Regular contact with court counselors	Services not required or, often, even offered.  Those that are offered are intended for adults and are therefore not developmentally appropriate for adolescents.

### **The Adult System is a Slap On the Wrist**

The adult system is typically thought of as punishment-oriented. However, because of the minor crimes they commit, **86 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds in the adult system receive probation<sup>1</sup>**, which means inconsistent treatment or rehabilitative services, minimal community restitution and little contact with probation officers. The only real punishment received by most youth – a lifelong adult criminal record – does not deter impulsive adolescents whose brains do not yet have the connections necessary to think long-term. At its worst, the adult system is a revolving door to more crime.

### **The Juvenile System Demands More of Youth and Families**

The juvenile system places more requirements on youth and their families. The deterrents in the juvenile system – required schooling, parental involvement, community and victim restitution, counseling, mentoring, training – are tailored to the impulsive adolescent brain, creating the structure and accountability that can help youth become responsible adults. With adequate funding and technical assistance, N.C.’s juvenile justice system would be equipped to provide an enhanced array of evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, culturally competent programming for at-risk and court involved youth ages 10-17, finally putting North Carolina’s juvenile justice policies in line with that of other states.

Not all young offenders have the structure and support necessary to turn their lives around. But most do. The adult system completely fails those young offenders who would benefit from the rehabilitative programs, services and education offered in the juvenile justice system.

<sup>1</sup> N.C. Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2007/08 Preliminary Youthful Accountability Planning Task Force Data, based on data provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts