



Support HB 632/SB 506: Juvenile Age to 18 **Adolescence Brains are Still *Under Construction***

As any parent knows, teenagers are works in progress. They do not have the same abilities as adults to make sound judgments in complex situations, to control their impulses or to plan effectively for the long term. Recent brain science has been able to demonstrate why it is that adolescents act like they do.

The Teenage Brain is a Work in Progress

- Research shows that the brain undergoes significant neural development during adolescence, including dramatic changes to structure and function, and that these changes impact the way adolescents process and react to information.
- The region of the brain that is the last to develop is that region that controls many of the abilities that govern goal-oriented, “rational” decision-making, such as long-term planning, impulse control, insight and judgment.

When these still-developing adolescents gain increased access to adult behaviors and situations, they are particularly vulnerable to making the kinds of poor decisions that get them involved in the criminal justice system.

Adolescent Experiences Matter for Life Outcomes

The rapid growth and development happening in adolescent brains make them highly elastic and malleable. The relationships made and behaviors learned during this crucial developmental stage are hard-wired into their architecture and help determine long-term life outcomes.

Adolescent Brains Require Nurturing

When young people hit a rough patch, guidance from responsible adults and developmentally appropriate programs, services and punishment can act as a scaffolding to support their healthy growth and development. The approach of the juvenile justice system is based on this science – in providing troubled adolescents with mentors, education, and developmentally appropriate punishment that actually deters future bad decisions, we acknowledge that, with proper guidance, most teenagers can mature into responsible adults. Adolescent experiences matter for life outcomes.

In contrast, warehousing minors in the adult system ensures that they will *not* have guidance from responsible adults or have access to age-appropriate programs, services and punishment to help build positive change into their brains during this crucial developmental period. Instead, they will face the reality of having a permanent criminal record and the increased likelihood of becoming career criminals. This is not the outcome we want for our children.

For more information contact: Brandy Bynum * brandy@ncchild.org * 919-834-6623 ext 234