

# Safer Communities, Better Outcomes: Keeping Kids out of the Adult Court System

Adolescence is a challenging time when many youth make mistakes that can result in police involvement. With good support, these indiscretions can be opportunities for them to mature and build skills that help them grow into successful adults.

Unfortunately, North Carolina's current approach to these issues undermines the future success of youthful offenders and jeopardizes public safety.

**North Carolina is one of only two states that automatically charges all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults, regardless of the crime.** This leaves kids with a permanent adult criminal record that makes it difficult to find a job, get a higher education, or even find housing. It's no surprise that children charged in the adult system are more likely to commit another crime than those charged in the juvenile system.

That's why legal experts and organizations across the political spectrum support 'raising the age' of juvenile jurisdiction and ending this outdated practice.

## Raising the Age promotes public safety

- Recidivism rates among 16-and 17-year olds handled by the adult criminal justice system are more than twice as high as those served by the juvenile justice system. Youth in the adult system are also more likely to re-offend in more serious and violent ways.
- North Carolina's juvenile justice system has a track record of providing effective services to youth as proven by the 37 percent reduction in the juvenile delinquency rate since 2000. The juvenile system is the appropriate system to handle youth, especially youth who accused of minor misbehavior.

## Raising the Age is fiscally responsible, saving taxpayer dollars

- Experience in other states shows that raising the age is cost-effective: In fact, Connecticut found that the actual cost of raising the age was much less than the projected costs. Illinois even found that the size and scope of the juvenile justice system decreased after raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction because of the policy's effectiveness.

### Partial List of Supporters:

- NC Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice
- NC Sheriffs' Association
- NC Association of Chiefs of Police
- Carolina Justice Policy Center
- John Locke Foundation
- NC Faith and Freedom Coalition
- Disability Rights NC
- ACLU of North Carolina
- NC Justice Center
- NC Chamber of Commerce Legal Institute
- NC Child
- Youth Justice Project NC

- By reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth, raise the age strengthens North Carolina's tax base and reduces future expenses.

## Raising the Age works for youth

- North Carolina's current policy leads to worse outcomes for youth. The consequences of an adult criminal conviction are serious, negative, life-long, and severely impair youth chances at future success.
- People with adult criminal records are significantly more likely to be unemployed than those without criminal records. In this economy, we need to ensure that adolescent mistakes do not become permanent educational and workforce barriers.
- Two-thirds of children in the criminal justice system have a least one disability. The juvenile justice system is far more effective setting for these children than the adult criminal justice system, because it offers needed services and support that can help youth with disabilities stay on track in the future.
- The adolescent brain is still developing. Character, personality traits, and the behavior of adolescents are highly receptive to change. Adolescents respond well to interventions, can learn to make responsible choices, and are likely to grow out of negative or delinquent behavior.

## Will North Carolina be last in line?

- Recognizing the harmful effects of these laws, 48 other states from Mississippi to Massachusetts have implemented changes to reduce the prosecution of youth in adult court and limit the placement of youth in adult jails and prisons.

## Contact

For more information about this or other issues related to child well-being, contact Matt Gross, Policy Director: [matt@ncchild.org](mailto:matt@ncchild.org) or 919-834-6623 x 234.