



03/14/2019 Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Re: "Raise the Age" Package

Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this incredibly important topic.

My name is Pete Letkemann. I sit on the Board of Citizens for Prison Reform, and Chair the Family Advisory Board to MDOC, and, more importantly, I am the father of an inmate who went in at barely 18. My son Alex is now into his 12th year of a 20-year minimum. But I am not here to tell you a horror story. As far as inmates go, it is an average story. But that fact alone makes it even sadder, I think, as these types of stories are all too common. My son, at 18, was bunked in a two-man cell with a 45-year-old, who -I didn't find out until much later- tried to extort sexual activity from him. Thankfully my son was able to handle the situation himself without escalation. My fear is that this is not always the outcome.

My point here is, even though my son would not have been covered by the bills now being discussed, the FACT that there are undeniable differences between kids in their late teens/early 20's and true, fully developed adults should not be ignored any longer. Not only would I like to add my voice to the chorus in favor of this package of bills, it is my hope that this is only the first phase of a much wider discussion on diversionary options for all "younger" offenders in our system.

That is what this is all about. Options. It is NOT about letting anyone "get away" with anything, it is about giving Judges, prosecutors and other seats of power the option to recognize circumstances where other consequences and programs might be the best path for us all. And by "us all" I mean the victim, the offender, both of their families, and society at large. It's time we recognize that retribution alone, when there are so many proven alternatives, is not best-practice in most of these cases. Let the Judges JUDGE. Why would we tie their hands in these matters? I think most would agree that there are at least SOME cases where 17-year-olds should be remanded to the Juvenile system. That thought alone should settle this question.

Please, whatever we do here, don't make this about the money. I'll leave the discussion about who foots what bill to the experts. But, what I will say is this. Ultimately, we are ALL footing the much higher bill of long-term imprisonment, not to mention the costs associated with re-integration into society and the devastation wrought on all families involved. I cannot speak for society at large, but I have to believe that we all want the best possible outcome for everyone, including the victims. I believe that this package of bills is huge step in the right direction. Thank-you all so much for your time.

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