



February 23, 2024

Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Members
Chair Latz, Vice Chair Oumou Verbeten, and Ranking Minority Leader Limmer

Re: [SF3694](#) Pappas: Raising the juvenile lower age from ten to thirteen

Dear Chair Latz and Members of the Committee:

The Justice for All Coalition is writing to express support for Senate File 3694. This bill proposes a crucial reform that addresses the issue of prosecuting and adjudicating children as young as ten years old in the juvenile court system.

Currently, the practice of detaining, prosecuting, and adjudicating children of this age misses vital rehabilitative opportunities. At this early age, many children lack the competence to stand trial, and the juvenile court system often fails to address the critical environmental factors within their family and social systems.

Recent research on adolescent brain development highlights the ongoing maturation process that extends into the 20s. Youth and young adults are still developing crucial brain areas, such as the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions, reasoning, and impulse control. This delayed development means that adolescents are more susceptible to negative peer influences and may overreact to situations due to their still-developing cognitive abilities. The underdeveloped prefrontal cortex in youth and young adults increases the likelihood of engaging in risky behavior. Without fully developed impulse control mechanisms, adolescents may be more prone to making impulsive decisions that can have negative consequences.

By shifting the age from ten to thirteen, this proposal ensures that interventions reach youth at critical developmental stages and leverage family systems and services. Moving the age considers research on a child's brain development. It prioritizes the importance and effectiveness of rehabilitation and bolstering developmentally appropriate responses and care for youth and young adults, which can decrease recidivism and promote long-term community well-being and safety.

We commend Senator Pappas for her leadership on this critical issue and urge all legislators to support Senate File 3694. This bill represents a significant step towards a more equitable, effective, and restorative juvenile justice system in our state that recognizes the ongoing maturation of the brain during adolescence and

The Justice for All Coalition is a collective of advocates, defendants, lawyers, social workers, leaders, and those who have firsthand experience with the criminal legal system pressing for or resisting reforms to seek meaningful legal system transformations that protect public safety while addressing and transforming those parts of the system that do more harm than good.



Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your support of Senate File 3694.

Sincerely,
Justice for All Coalition

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