



# Wisconsin Juvenile Court Intake Association, Inc.

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March 11, 2021

Joint Committee on Finance  
Room 111 North  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

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Re: Support for returning 17-year-olds to the Juvenile Justice System

Dear Joint Finance Committee Member:

The Wisconsin Juvenile Court Intake Association (WJCA) is writing in support of the proposal by Governor Tony Evers to raise the age of adult jurisdiction to 18 years of age for youth in Wisconsin.

Beginning on January 1, 1996 all Wisconsin youth at age 17 became subject to the adult court jurisdiction. Prevailing thought, at the time, was moving 17-year-old youth to the adult criminal justice system would promote accountability for criminal conduct, promote consistency in the age of adult court jurisdiction with the states of Illinois and Michigan, deter an increase in violent behavior by older offenders (super predators), and redirect resources to younger offenders. The expectation was adult jurisdiction would bring swift and severe consequences to these 17-year-old youth. It was also believed these 17-year-olds would have the capacity to be effectively deterred from crime by adult criminal sanctions.

Studies show youth tried in the adult system violate the law again more quickly (and with more serious and/or violent crimes) than those tried in the juvenile system. According to the US Supreme Court, adolescents are different from adults as they lack maturity and have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility. They are more vulnerable to negative influences and outside pressures. Marsh Levick, Deputy Director and Chief Counsel, at the Juvenile Law Center in Louisiana, claims there is uncontradicted research demonstrating there is a much greater risk of reoffending by anyone who comes through the adult system. She states there is a significantly lower risk of reoffending for juveniles who are rehabilitated and treated through the Juvenile Justice System.

There is also a concern of confusion for the 17-year-old youth going through the adult criminal system when they are not yet adults themselves. There are no other branches of government or areas of their lives where a 17-year-old is considered an adult, which appears to be a contradiction in regards to what is expected of them in the legal system. Once “raise-the-age” measures go into effect in Michigan and Missouri in 2021, there will be only three states to still automatically consider 17-year-olds as adults in criminal cases: Texas, Georgia and Wisconsin.

WJCA and the youth of Wisconsin would appreciate your support in this long overdue change.

Thank you,  
WJCA Legislative Committee