

“RAISE THE AGE” CAMPAIGNS: WORK THAT REMAINS

Across the country, tens of thousands of children are prosecuted and incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system every year. The Raise the Age (RTA) movement seeks to change this harmful approach by ensuring that most youth under 18 start in the juvenile system.

WHAT IS RTA?

- Raise the Age is a campaign to change laws throughout the country so that no child under 18 will be tried as an adult solely because of their age.
- In states that have raised the age, children accused of certain crimes can still be charged as adults and transferred into the adult criminal justice system.
- Raise the Age does not ensure that all youth under 18 stay in the juvenile justice system, but requires at least that most start in this age-appropriate system.

WHY RTA?

- Research shows that adolescents' cognitive skills are still developing, which makes them more impulsive and less aware of the consequences of their actions, and more responsive to the kinds of programming offered in a juvenile justice setting.
- Youth under 18 in the adult system are much more likely to commit suicide or to be the victims of abuse such as sexual and physical assault, and youth prosecuted in the adult system are 34% more likely to recidivate and with more violent offenses.¹
- Raising the age, where implemented, has neither cost more, led to more crime, nor had a negative burden on state juvenile justice systems.

WHO STILL NEEDS TO RTA?

- Three states (Georgia, Texas, Wisconsin) still treat all 17-year-olds as adults, regardless of their offense.
- In these three states, between 85-95% of youth under 18 charged as adults are accused of low level, non-violent offenses.

IS THERE MOMENTUM FOR RTA?

- Over the past decade, 11 states have passed legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18.² In 2018, Vermont raised the age of criminal responsibility to 20, excepting violent felonies. Legislation has been introduced in Georgia, Texas, and Wisconsin but hasn't yet passed.
- As of December 2019, when NY and NC raise the age laws went into full effect, for the first time no state automatically includes 16-year-olds in adult court based solely on their age.

Endnotes:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Effects on Violence of Laws and Policies Facilitating the Transfer of Youth from the Juvenile to the Adult Justice System: Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services*. (2007). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5609a1.htm>.

² CT, IL, LA, MA, MI, MO, MS, NH, NC, NY, and SC.

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