

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY
M., A FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUTH IN THE DC JAIL

PREPARED FOR
THE DC COUNCIL HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE JUDICIARY
COMMITTEES

HEARING ON BILL 17-913 THE JUVENILE JUSTICE IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT OF
2008

OCTOBER 20, 2008

I was born and raised in Washington, D.C. I was charged as an adult when I was 17. I spent almost a year incarcerated in the D.C. Jail. I'm making positive decisions that will determine the outcome of my future, but with a felony conviction on my record, I feel like I'm serving a second sentence: being punished twice.

I know that there need to be consequences for wrong actions, but *everyone* makes mistakes. Juveniles especially need help to get their lives back on the right track. Right now, they are placed in adult facilities that have a lack of education programs, a toxic mental environment, and poor mental and physical health services. This only makes their problems worse and makes them more likely to get in worse trouble. It's setting them up for downfall in their future instead of a successful rehabilitation.

The first reason that kids shouldn't be in adult jail is that there aren't any education programs in adult jail for people my age. My entire time I was in the D.C. Jail I went without any type of schooling, period. Only special ed. programs were offered. The only people who gave me books were from the Free Minds Book Club. Most of the youth in the jail, including myself, were already behind in school. With no educational programs in the jail, they all came home even further behind. Juveniles need to be placed where they have access to programs that will help them move forward in life by getting jobs and going to college after they're released. Without a proper education or a GED, juveniles are liable to go back to their old habits and get locked up again.

The second reason juveniles shouldn't be detained in an adult facility is there's so much violence and negativity. After awhile you start to adapt to all the frustration, stress, depression, and violence as if it was a normal way of life. Sooner or later you find yourself always angry and showing a lot of aggression towards everyone. You also become paranoid and have trust issues. It's a totally different world where you have to constantly be aware, and you always have a feeling that someone's trying to get close to you just to hurt you in the end. Once you get released, it's hard sometimes to hang with your family and friends because your state of mind in jail follows you out. Juveniles in adult

facilities are learning how to be better criminals, which is only going to lead to more violence and crime. Juveniles should be in juvenile facilities where there are programs to help them move on in life instead of becoming career criminals.

The third reason why we need to keep kids out of adult jails is because jails can't keep kids safe and healthy. Some of the cell doors are broken, so you're never safe, and you can be attacked by other inmates at night. Things that required medical attention are ignored or left unattended. People get sick a lot because of spider bites, boils, and breakouts from unsanitary conditions like dirty covers. You usually have to put in a lot of sick calls or make a lot of commotion to get someone's attention. Some people went days without eating because more aggressive inmates steal food from the weaker ones. Some people had money from their parents stolen by other inmates.

As you can see, the lack of education programs, violent environment, and poor health and safety make adult facilities the wrong place for juveniles. Youth at the age of 15 to 18 are supposed to be learning how to become adults, not how to be a prisoner. They need programs to help them learn how to make better decisions, like GED programs, job training programs, and college courses. They need positive male role models, not criminals as mentors. That's why I urge you today, Councilmembers, to vote for this bill, because it will keep kids out of the adult system.

Even now that I'm out of adult jail, I feel like I'm serving a second sentence: being punished twice. With an adult record, I can't vote, and it's hard to get a job. I still have a piece of jail in me that's going to be with me for the rest of my life. Every once in a while I wake up and think I'm still there. There's so much in adult jail that can mess kids up physically and mentally. Please vote to keep kids out of adult facilities.

Sincerely,



M.