



National Council on Crime and Delinquency
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 31, 2010

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**National Council on Crime and Delinquency supports proposed legislation to return
17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system in Wisconsin**

MADISON, Wis.— The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) supports the legislation (AB 732) introduced by Rep. Fred Kessler (D-Milwaukee) to return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system and raise the age of criminal prosecution from 17 to 18.

There is overwhelming evidence to support such a change in policy. Data clearly show that society benefits when youth are tried in juvenile court. Youth who stay in the juvenile justice system have lower rates of reoffending than youth with the same offense histories who are waived to adult court. According to research by the Centers for Disease Control, minors transferred to the adult criminal justice system are approximately 34% more likely to be re-arrested once they return to the community. Hence, keeping youth in the juvenile justice system results in improved public safety, reduced costs related to subsequent offenses, and better lives for youth, both in terms of their experience while in custody and their decreased likelihood of further system involvement and criminal behavior afterwards.

The juvenile justice system places much greater emphasis on rehabilitation, on services and education, and on maintaining ties to family and community. Transferring a 17-year-old to adult court shuts off the flow of rehabilitative services and opens the door to the most severe punishments possible, including a greater risk of physical assault while incarcerated; an adult criminal record; permanent barriers to employment and federal and state assistance; disenfranchisement; and the lasting negative psychological and behavioral impact of time spent in the harsh environment of an adult correctional facility.

National data also demonstrate that the practice of trying 17-year-olds in the adult justice system has a disproportionate impact on youth of color. Minority youth are more likely to be waived to adult court. While the inequities brought about by this policy are distressing enough, the cumulative impact an adult criminal record has on the lives of minority youth keeps many at a disadvantage throughout adulthood.

Charging 17-year-olds as adults was intended for the most serious offenses. It has not worked out that way, and the results have been abysmal. Such laws have not produced a safer society, have not reduced costs to taxpayers, and have increased recidivism. Continuing a failed policy serves no one well. Change will benefit all citizens of Wisconsin.

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