



The **CAMPAIGN** for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of **YOUTH**

BILL: SF 2909 - The Omnibus Public Safety & Judiciary Finance Bill

DATE: May 2, 2023

POSITION: Support with the inclusion of HF 1300/SF 1325

COMMITTEE: Conference Committee on SF 2909

CONTACT: Preston Shipp (Preston@cfsy.org)

Chair Moller and distinguished members of the Conference Committee on SF 2909:

The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth respectfully submits this testimony to express our support for including in SF 2909 the provisions from HF 1300/SF 1325, abolishing life without parole for juveniles and establishing 15-year release eligibility for people who were younger than 18 when they committed their crimes. These provisions are rooted in the belief that children who cause harm are still children, deserving of our care and concern, and we must leave room for them to move beyond the worst act of their young lives and realize a redeemed future.

The U.S. Supreme Court, relying on the science of adolescent brain development, has concluded that children are fundamentally, constitutionally different from adults. Based on these holdings, 27 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws abolishing life without parole for kids and creating second-look opportunities that focus on rehabilitation and the unique potential that children have to experience profound positive transformation as they mature. HF 1300/SF 1325 is in line with these Supreme Court decisions, the brain science, and the 27 other states, including Arkansas, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia, that have already passed this kind of legislation. In all of these states, the people who are being given second chances are doing what we would expect rehabilitated people to do. They are raising families, serving their communities as mentors to at-risk youth, and working as substance abuse counselors, truck drivers, juvenile court program directors, translators, social workers, paralegals, re-entry specialists, and directors of food ministries. Nationwide, almost 1,000 people are now home who were told as children that they would die in prison. And among former juvenile lifers, there is a rate of recidivism of only 1.14 percent.

As a former Tennessee prosecutor, I place great value on personal accountability, the rights and needs of victims, and public safety. But true justice is never a zero-sum game. We need sentencing policies, especially for children, that balance these important concerns with meaningful opportunities for children to mature, experience rehabilitation, and demonstrate that they are ready to live successful, productive lives outside prison walls. For these reasons, I ask that you include the provisions of HF 1300/SF1325 in SF2909, the Omnibus Public Safety & Judiciary Finance Bill.