

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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*Twin Cities Campus*

*Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center  
Division of General Pediatrics & Adolescent Health  
Department of Pediatrics – Medical School*

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My name is Kara Beckman and I write to express my support for HF 3671.

I am a researcher at the University of Minnesota's Medical School, where I conduct applied research with partners in education and juvenile justice to illuminate how the science of developmental psychology applies to their work responding to problematic or harmful child and youth behavior. I am also a mother of three, resident of South St. Paul, and descendant of farmers and health care workers. Between my lived experience and my research, I have come to learn the primary accountability approaches we use with children and youth are ineffective and harmful. What I see in the criminal justice system as it applies to children compels this testimony.

I strongly urge you to support HF 3671. The alternative is to maintain age 10 as the lower age of juvenile court jurisdiction, which defies logic and common sense. Let us be clear what we are saying with laws that indicate the criminal justice system is the best response we have to a 10-, 11- or 12-year old child who engages in illegal behavior.

- We are saying the most important question to address for this child is whether they are guilty of a crime, rather than whether they have needs that are not being met.
- We are saying – in theory – that children who are still in elementary school can be held fully responsible for impulsive and rash behavior (despite other laws which prohibit those same children from voting, driving or even being at the mall or in parks alone.)
  - In practice, those in charge of implementing this law know that children this age are not ready to be held fully liable for their behavior. Most frequently what happens is children under 13 or 14 are declared incompetent to understand court proceedings, thereby delaying or missing opportunities to meaningfully addressing the incident. We end up wasting money on delaying proceedings while a court waits for a child to turn 13 or 14. Let us spend this money on something meaningful, useful and timely.
- We are also saying that the state is better suited than this child's parents, families, and others who know the children well to determine what accountability and healing look like.

To justify keeping the age of court jurisdiction at age 10, I would want us to have high levels of success and confidence in our strategies. Yet, is that the reality? What are the outcomes in the criminal justice system for children younger than 13? Why can I get a "Minnesota Report Card" on my child's school and every other school district from the Minnesota Department of Education but there is no such transparency from the criminal justice system where I can find and compare public information on the actual outcomes achieved through our public safety responses?

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In the absence of meaningful information on the effectiveness of our system, we should rely on other evidence. And there is evidence to inform what types of responses would be most effective, but they don't live within a system designed to determine guilt and impose consequences. In a child's brain, consequences imposed by an unknown person is most likely to result in reactions of fear, defiance or disconnection. Those feelings shut down the ability to feel empathy, remorse or to learn from the behavior, and to be honest about what root causes were behind the behavior. That is the opposite of what I want for my children, and it is the opposite of what I want for any child.

I urge you to support HF 3671 which would raise the lower age of jurisdiction for juvenile court and detention from 10 to 13.

Sincerely,



Kara Beckman

Researcher

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