

HENNEPIN COUNTY

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3/1/23

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Senator Ron Latz
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St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Latz, Rep. Feist, and Members of the House and Senate:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my support for HF1300 and SF1325, legislation that aims to eliminate the practice of sentencing youth to life without parole.

Since 2005, the Supreme Court has recognized the unique developmental characteristics of adolescents and has placed important limits on sentences for youth, banning the use of capital punishment, limiting life without parole sentences to homicide offenses, and banning mandatory life without parole sentences. The Court has also applied these decisions retroactively.

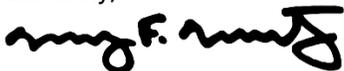
The latest brain science clearly shows young people's brains are not fully developed until their mid-20s. This means that they are more likely to engage in impulsive behavior, be influenced by peer pressure, and have limited ability to assess risks and consequences. This research also means they are susceptible to developmentally-appropriate rehabilitative efforts that can be delivered in appropriately-secure settings.

Given this scientific evidence, it is clear that sentencing youth to life without parole is a disproportionate punishment that fails to consider the unique developmental characteristics of youth. Yet the unconstitutional law allowing for mandatory life without parole for youth remains enshrined in statute.

This bill would address Minnesota's unconstitutional statute while also ensuring that youth who commit serious offenses are held accountable in a way that recognizes our deeper understanding of brain development. While the proposed bill will mean that youth who committed serious offenses will have an opportunity for parole review, it does not mean that youth who have committed serious crimes will go unpunished. Rather, it allows for more flexibility in sentencing to enable judges to consider individual circumstances, age, level of culpability, and potential for rehabilitation. It will also ensure that youth are held accountable for their actions in a way that is proportionate and just.

Minnesota is behind other states in responding to this ruling and research. Some, including California, Illinois, and Massachusetts, have already eliminated juvenile LWOP sentences and have not seen negative impacts on public safety. It is time we join others in recognizing the unique developmental characteristics of young people and providing them a path toward rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.

Sincerely,



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Hennepin County Attorney

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