



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

**COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF 19-H 5333,
RELATING TO PAROLE
March 5, 2019**

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this bill, which requires that juveniles sentenced as adults be reviewed by the parole board no later than fifteen years into their sentence.

The psychological research is clear that juveniles have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, are more vulnerable to peer pressure, are less capable than adults of perceiving and comprehending long term consequences, and have much less control of their environment in ways that change with age. The imposition of very long prison sentences on a person under 18 years of age constitutes, in our view, cruel and unusual punishment and violates basic human rights standards.

This legislation does not mandate the release of these individuals after fifteen years; the Parole Board maintains the discretion to deny parole to anyone they determine is not yet prepared to reenter the community. Rather, H-5333 ensures that children sentenced as adults come before the parole board relatively early into their adulthood, granting them the opportunity to demonstrate how they have matured and changed since their childhood offense.

It is worth noting the incredibly broad range of national organizations that support parole eligibility for children who are sentenced as adults. They include the American Bar Association, the American Correctional Association, the American Probation and Parole Association, the American Psychological Association, the National PTA, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Support of this legislation would also place Rhode Island in line with similar reforms adopted in twenty other states, including our nearby states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

In short, no person under the age of 18 should be treated as irredeemable and locked away automatically for the majority of their life. The ACLU of Rhode Island respectfully urges the committee's support and passage of this legislation.