

To Members of the Rhode Island Legislature:

A letter in opposition to budget Article 22, the proposal to try 17 year olds as adults

We, the undersigned organizations, oppose this proposal. The ACI is no place for youth. All across the nation youth who are transferred to the adult criminal justice system face negative, life-altering consequences. We need to stop this bad policy change.

➤ **Trying youth as adults does not promote public safety or reduce crime.**

Nationally, research shows that recidivism rates are lower for youth treated in the juvenile justice system. Youth who have been exposed to the adult criminal justice system are more likely to re-offend, more quickly and at higher rates. Latest studies from the Centers for Disease Control show that sending youth to adult prisons increase violence.

➤ **This proposal places teenagers at risk.**

Young people placed in the adult prison system are at a much greater risk of assault, abuse and death, including suicide, than if they were placed in juvenile facilities. Additionally, youth of color will be disproportionately affected, thus increasing the racial disparities of our criminal justice system.

➤ **Adult convictions obstruct future opportunities.**

An adult criminal record is accessible to employers, lenders and numerous other agencies. Even as youth try to move on with their lives, a possible adult conviction will reduce chances of employment or financial aid for college.

➤ **This provision is not cost effective. We must invest in the future of our communities, not in incarceration.**

Many studies show that diverting youth into rehabilitation is one of the most cost effective criminal justice reforms that can be made. At the Rhode Island Training School, youth participate in programs specific to their needs, including anger management and individual counseling. At the ACI, youth will not have access to the individualized care and treatment they need. **Diverting juvenile offenders into successful rehabilitative programs instead of prison was found to save, across many studies and states, \$1,470 for every participant.**

Further, a 1998 study found that preventing teens from adopting a life of crime (including adult offenses) could save the country between \$1.7 million and \$2.3 million per youth. Investing in the Training School and other Family Court and DCYF programs will deter youth from a life of adult crime and save the state the costs of future incarceration.

➤ **This provision does not consider increased costs to the Department of Corrections or to other departments.**

This budget provision could add a significant increase to the DOC population at a time when the population is already beyond capacity. The DOC budget, including the Correctional Officer budget, does not reflect this increase. According to Department of Corrections Director A.T. Wall, sending youth to the ACI would “put an additional strain on our already overburdened institutions.”

Youth offenders that are placed in the Rhode Island prison either have to be placed in more expensive custody, which averages a similar amount to the cost of housing a juvenile at the training school, or have to be placed into unsafe conditions with the general adult population.

➤ **This policy is highly unpopular.**

According to a 2007 nationwide Zogby poll, **92% of Americans** believe that instead of a blanket policy about trying youth in adult court, these decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.

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