

House Bill 1433
Chairman: Luke Clippenger
House Judiciary
February 26, 2025 1 p.m.
Former Teacher, Principal, and Chief School Leadership Officer

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1433, which seeks to reform how we treat juveniles in the justice system. My perspective is informed by 33 years in education, most of which I spent working with students between the ages of 14 and 18. Through these years, I have witnessed firsthand the cognitive, emotional, and social development of teenagers. It is clear that they are not fully formed adults, nor should they be treated as such in our legal system.

Teenagers lack the cognitive maturity to function as adults, which is why society does not afford them the same rights and responsibilities as adults. We do not allow them to vote, sign legal contracts, or even rent a car because we recognize that their decision-making abilities are still developing. Yet, when they commit crimes, some advocate for treating them as if they possess the full mental and emotional faculties of an adult. This is fundamentally flawed and contradicts what we know about adolescent brain development.

Additionally, zero-tolerance policies have proven ineffective. Rather than addressing the root causes of juvenile crime, these policies rely on punitive measures that often exacerbate the issues. We need to honor the legal systems already in place and allow judges the discretion to examine all the evidence before determining an appropriate path forward when a young person commits a serious offense. A one-size-fits-all approach does not serve justice or public safety.

Furthermore, placing juveniles in adult facilities causes irreparable harm and often leads to increased violent and undesirable behavior in their adult years. Many young people who commit violent crimes have been victims themselves—suffering from physical and even sexual abuse. Subjecting them to adult incarceration settings increases their risk of further victimization and trauma, which only perpetuates the cycle of violence rather than rehabilitating them into contributing members of society.

The research is clear: charging youth as adults is ineffective, biased, and harmful. A study by the Human Impact Partners underscores how these practices disproportionately impact marginalized communities and fail to achieve meaningful justice. Instead, we must pursue evidence-based alternatives that focus on rehabilitation and consider the developmental differences between youth and adults.

House Bill 1433 is a necessary step toward a more just and effective legal system. I urge you to support this bill and prioritize solutions that align with what we know about adolescent development and justice reform.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Frank V. Eastham Jr.
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