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## Memorandum of Support Raise the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction to Age 18

Only New York and North Carolina automatically treat 16- and 17-year-olds as adults when they're accused of a crime, any crime, even though there's wide agreement, including from Gov. Andrew Cuomo, that doing so is a mistake.

The application of adult sentencing guidelines to children can result in sentences that by any normal standard are brutal and inhumane. For example, in Albany recently, a child with no prior record was sentenced to nine years in prison for stealing a pair of sneakers. We have to stop treating children this way.

Interfaith Impact of NYS calls on the Legislature to change the law during this session. Raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to age 18 and process all 16- and 17-year-old youths accused of crimes as juveniles and customize sentencing to youth for all but the gravest crimes of violence. We also call for access to programs and services tailored to support rehabilitation for all minors under age 18.

Processing youth as adults has negative consequences for the individuals and their communities. Most (86%) of these children are accused or convicted of non-violent offenses. Raising the age of criminal responsibility will reduce crime, recidivism and costs to the state. (For detailed information, see the "[Final Report of the Governor's Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice](#)" and its recommendations for juvenile justice reform.) We note that other states address the needs of these youth—more effectively and at lower cost—through robust community-based services to help families.

Reforming juvenile justice policy in New York is a profound moral issue. We are mistreating children whose brains and personalities are still being formed. Research into brain development underscores that adolescents are in fact children and that the human brain is not fully formed until the age of 25. Our religious affirmation of individual worth and dignity requires us to recognize that the cognitive skills of adolescents are developing, adolescents' behavior is often impulsive, and adolescents lack the ability to focus on the consequences of their behavior. At this stage in their lives, they can be rehabilitated, and treating them as adults is extremely harmful.

IINYS urges the Legislature to pay heed to the developmental needs of children caught up in the criminal justice system, and raise the age now.

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