Raising the Age in Georgia

Georgia is **one of only three states** (along with Texas and Wisconsin) that processes all 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system, sending them to adult court rather than through the juvenile justice system.\(^{12}\)

In recent years, several states have raised the maximum age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 up to 18 (or older) to reflect the growing body of research which shows that brain development at age 17 is at a fundamentally different stage than that of an adult.

In 2018, **6,661** 17-year-olds were arrested in Georgia.\(^1\)

Only **5%** of these arrests were for violent crimes.

123 counties in Georgia had **fewer than 50 arrests** of 17-year-olds in 2018.

Even if Georgia raises the age to 18, youth as young as 13 with certain violent felonies may still be tried as adults. Such crimes include murder, rape, armed robbery committed with a firearm, aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, and voluntary manslaughter.

**IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS**

Data shows lower level offenders, when confined with higher level offenders, emerge from incarceration more inclined to conduct criminal activity.\(^{14}\) Evidence-based alternatives to detention have been proven to reduce the likelihood of criminal activity.\(^5\) Georgia has already taken steps to improve public safety. To date, Georgia has seen a **40% reduction** in juvenile incarceration since 2013.\(^3\)

www.georgiavoices.org
Juvenile court is preparing juveniles for adulthood recognizing that they are still children.

Georgia's Juvenile Justice Incentive Grants (JJIG) and Community Services Grants fund the delivery of six evidence-based programs proven effective for juveniles: Functional Family Therapy, Thinking for a Change, Aggression Replacement Training, Multisystemic Therapy, Seven Challenges, and Brief Strategic Family Therapy. Together the two grants make these therapies available to juvenile court jurisdictions encompassing 98% of Georgia's youth.5

JJIG served 1,390 youth at moderate or high risk to reoffend in 2018.

and

93%

served by one of the grants were actively enrolled or had completed high school (in 2017)5

resulting in a

57%

reduction in out-of-home placements in JJIG-participating counties5

70%

successfully completed their evidence-based programs.5

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is the 181st school district in the state. Georgia Preparatory Academy is the middle and high school within the DJJ school system with 30 campuses across the state in detention and transitional centers. Additionally, Pathways to Succeed is an adult education program that offers GED instruction and testing. The Connections Graduate Program focuses on re-entry, work skills development, and post secondary options.2
17-year-olds are still in the adolescent phase of brain development, where their executive functioning skills are not yet fully developed. Executive function allows for self-control, regulating emotions, and understanding different points of view.6

Studies show that, when compared to adults, 17-year-olds are:7
- less capable of impulse control
- less able to regulate their emotions
- less able to consider the consequences of their actions
- more easily influenced by their environment
- more likely to change course if given the right support

The U.S. Supreme Court* finds adolescents are more capable of change than adults and should be given the opportunity to rehabilitate.11

*Graham v. Florida (2010)

- Nationally, youth are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult facility than a juvenile facility.2
- In 2018, 3,211 Georgia youth in detention were provided mental health treatment.3
- From 2014-2018, more than 8,000 youth have received individual or group therapy through evidence-based models delivered by the Georgia juvenile justice system.5
ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RAISING THE AGE

States that have recently raised the age have experienced no or minimal cost increases while lowering arrest and detention rates.

CONNECTICUT\(^{12}\)
Raised the age in \textbf{2007}

\begin{itemize}
  \item In the first year, Connecticut:
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Saved $2 million
      \item Decreased reliance on confinement
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

NORTH CAROLINA\(^{12, 20}\)
Raise the age law effective in \textbf{December 2019}

\begin{itemize}
  \item 16 and 17-year-olds will now go into the juvenile court system
  \item Reduced reliance on detention facilities, generating cost savings to put toward increased youth population\(^{15}\)
\end{itemize}

\textbf{In the first month, lawmakers anticipated:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{1,683 complaints} by law enforcement; but there were \textbf{only 407}.\(^{20}\)
  \item \textbf{60 arrests} of 17-year-olds; but there were \textbf{78}. Only 3-4% were for more serious crimes, which were automatically transferred to adult court.\(^{20}\)
\end{itemize}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{State Juvenile Arrests Drop After Raising the Age}
\end{figure}

Connecticut, Illinois, and Massachusetts have seen significant drops in juvenile arrests after raising the age up to 18.\(^{12}\)

Sources: [https://tinyurl.com/RTAReferences2020](https://tinyurl.com/RTAReferences2020)

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