Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair
Senate Public Safety Committee
State Capitol, Room 2031
Sacramento, CA 95814

Fax: 916-445-4688

Re: **Support for S.B. 1391 (Lara)**
    Ending Transfer of 14- and 15-Year-Olds to Adult Court
    Hearing set for April 3, 2018

Dear Chairperson Skinner and Members of the Senate Public Safety Committee:

This letter is written on behalf of Youth ALIVE!, in support of S.B. 1391 (Lara),
which would end the transfer to adult court of children 14 and 15 years of age. S.B.
1391 properly recognizes that 14- and 15-year-olds are developmentally different and
should not be treated like adults in the criminal justice system.

Youth ALIVE! is a violence prevention and intervention organization that helps
young people become leaders and advocates for the change they would like to see in
their communities through our Teens on Target Program, mentors and supports healing
for young people who have been violently injured through our Caught in the Crossfire
program, and works with families grieving in the wake of a homicide through our
Khadyf Washington Project.

We strongly believe when youth commit crimes, they are less likely to commit
crimes in the future if they are given age-appropriate services and education available
in the juvenile system. By prohibiting the transfer to adult court of youth age 14 and 15
years of age, S.B. 1391 will help to ensure that youth receive the treatment, counseling,
and education they need to develop into healthy successful, adults.

S.B. 1391 is consistent with modern research on adolescent development and
brain science. We know now that the brain is not fully developed until the mid-twenties,
and that many of the impulsive, risk-taking behaviors of young teenagers reflect
developmental stages that most will pass through in a few years. Very few youth will
grow up to be career criminals, even if they committed a serious offense as a 14- or 15-
year-old.

The children affected by S.B. 1391 are really young — often still in middle
school. They are not even old enough to drive a car, and yet our current law allows them
to be sentenced to decades in state prison. Many of them have unmet needs in relation
to abuse, disabilities, behavioral health issues, and poverty. They are disproportionately
youth of color.

Youth ALIVE is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID is 94-3143254.
Although the adult prison system is attempting to improve its capacity to provide rehabilitation, it pales in comparison with what the juvenile system has to offer. In the juvenile system, these young people are required to receive the same compulsory education services provided to all children, as well as individualized services to address behavioral health, disabilities, trauma and other needs. In the state prison system, these kinds of services are not required, and often are not available. Also, staff in local and state juvenile facilities receive special training to address the needs of adolescents – something that is missing in the state prison system.

California only began to allow transfer of 14- and 15-year-olds beginning in 1994 – in a “get tough” era fueled by widespread, later discredited fears about violent juveniles. S.B. 1391 would help to restore a more sensible balance to our laws that recognizes that younger children simply should not be handled in the adult system.

Thank you for your consideration. Youth ALIVE! urges a “yes” vote on S.B. 1391.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Anne Marks
Executive Director

cc: Senator Ricardo Lara (Attention: Michelle Valdivia, Consultant)
Senator Joel Anderson (Vice Chair)
Senator Steven Bradford
Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson
Senator Holly J. Mitchell
Senator Jeff Stone
Senator Scott D. Wiener