



PREVENTING VIOLENCE  
AND DEVELOPING  
YOUTH LEADERS

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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

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ANNE C. MARKS  
Executive Director  
Youth ALIVE!  
Oakland, CA

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 Khadafy 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.

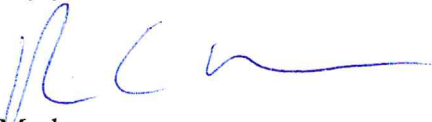
The children affected by S.B. 1391 are really young – often still in middle school. They are not even old enough to drive a car, and yet our current law allows them to be sentenced to decades in state prison. Many of them have unmet needs in relation to abuse, disabilities, behavioral health issues,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

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,



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