



PREVENTING VIOLENCE  
AND DEVELOPING  
YOUTH LEADERS

April 2, 2015

The Honorable Loni Hancock  
California State Senator  
Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee  
State Capitol, Room 2082  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 261 (Hancock)

Dear Senator Hancock:

Youth ALIVE! supports the passage of your Senate Bill 261. We believe California should treat its young adults fairly. Our laws should reflect the fact that young people have tremendous potential to mature and change. SB 261 recognizes that the brain does not fully develop until the early-20s. It holds young adults who committed a crime while under age 23 responsible for their criminal behavior, but gives them a chance to turn their lives around. SB 261 is smart on crime and fiscally smart for California.

Youth ALIVE! is an Oakland-based violence prevention and youth leadership organization. We help young people cultivate leadership skills and recover from violence they have experienced personally and through their environments. Because we work with young people, we know they can make mistakes and also that with the proper resources, they can do amazing things. Our young people teach others how to prevent violence, speak at City Council meetings and give testimony at the State Capital, and go to college. We want all young people to have the opportunity to find their voices and to lead lives that enrich their communities.

SB 261 requires accountability for young adults. It holds them accountable for their actions while requiring them to pursue rehabilitation and deepen their remorse. First, it mandates a young person serve a minimum of ten years in prison before the possibility of review. This is a substantial amount of time for any young-adult, amounting to nearly half of his or her life lived so far. Second, SB 261 requires a youth offender work towards rehabilitation and remorse for the crime. These common-sense provisions strengthen public safety.

The latest scientific evidence on adolescent development supports the justification for SB 261. Research shows that certain areas of the brain, particularly those that affect judgment and decision-making, do not fully develop until the early 20's. This is confirmed in studies by Stanford University (2009), University of Alberta (2011), and the National Institute of Mental Health (2011). The fact that young adults are still developing means that they are uniquely situated for personal

Youth ALIVE is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID is 94-3143254.

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growth. SB 261 would continue the SB 260 trend towards reflecting the latest scientific evidence on young-adult development by recognizing that young-adults who were under the age of 23 at the time of their crime have an especially strong ability to grow and change.

SB 261 expands the youth offender parole hearing process created by SB 260 (Hancock), Chapter 312, Statutes of 2013. Under current law, eligible inmates are given opportunity to have such a hearing after serving a lengthy prison sentence. Youth ALIVE! supports the opportunity for young people to return to live beyond bars and contribute to their communities – understanding that the mistakes they make are not the only things that define them.

People in their early-20s are still developing, and the direction of that development is not one that can be treated with reliability. The US Supreme Court has recognized this, stating that young adults through their mid-20s "are overrepresented statistically in virtually every category of reckless behavior." *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551, 569. California also already recognizes this through its jurisdiction of the Division of Juvenile Justice, which detains and provides programming to young people until age 23. SB 261 would follow SB 260 by providing the opportunity to examine a defendant's life after he or she has had an opportunity to prove him or herself.

For these reasons, we support SB 261 and urge the California Legislature to pass this important bill. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (510) 594-2588.

Sincerely,

Anne Marks  
Executive Director, Youth ALIVE!