

Bill requiring attorneys when police interrogate minors is the right move

Law enforcement officials have complained that the proposal would delay solving crimes. But juveniles are more likely to give false confessions, and it's better to get it right than quick.

By [CST Editorial Board](#)

Feb 12, 2024, 5:48pm CST

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/editorials/2024/02/12/police-juvenile-interrogations-lawyers-miranda-rights-robert-peters-editorial>

Even a minor accused of a violent crime is still a child, who may not understand the seriousness of being arrested or the importance of securing legal representation early on.

[In fact, 90% of boys and girls taken into custody](#) waive their Miranda rights, studies show. And as an American Bar Association article concluded, research also shows it's not at all clear that children understand what they're giving up by waiving those rights.

Add not asking for a lawyer to that mix, and it makes perfect sense that juveniles are more inclined than adults to make false confessions during police interrogations.

A glimpse of a badge and gun could easily get an intimidated teenager or child to just start talking and tell officers what they want to hear, even if he or she didn't break the law. The goal, in that moment, is for the questions to simply stop. "Teenagers prioritize short-term benefits over long-term consequences and are especially prone to comply with the requests of authority figures like police," according to the [Juvenile Law Center](#).

Shades of that scenario likely unfolded when a Waukegan police detective took less than an hour to get a 15-year-old boy to confess to a shooting he had nothing to do with: He was out of town when the crime took place.

If the teen had an attorney or a parent present during the 2022 interrogation, it's likely he wouldn't have had to deal with the humiliation of spending time in jail before his basketball team provided an alibi.

Prompted by reporting by WBEZ's Chip Mitchell on that case, state Sen. Robert Peters, D-Chicago, introduced a bill last week in the Illinois Legislature that would require the attendance of an attorney at all police interrogations involving youth under 18. It's an easy call for us to support the proposal.

Any statement a juvenile makes without a lawyer by his or her side would be inadmissible as evidence under the proposed legislation, which is supported by Gov. J.B. Pritzker and expands on an existing law that makes it compulsory to automatically assign an attorney to anyone under 15 charged with murder or sexual assault.

Law enforcement officials and prosecutors have complained that the proposed bill will just lead teens and children to clam up and refuse to talk to investigators, delaying the process of solving a crime over the long run.

But as we noted in August, when Illinois lawmakers began discussing idea, any extra hours of investigation are preferable to the time, money and emotional distress of a false confession.

The proposed legislation will help rebuild community trust in police who work in Illinois, infamously known as "the wrongful conviction capital of the world," Peters said.

The road to justice might take a bit longer. But at least the path would better shield innocent minors from unnecessary harm. *****