

# *Juvenile Justice Initiative*

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**QUESTIONS?** Contact JJI - email: [bcjjustice@gmail.com](mailto:bcjjustice@gmail.com) 847-894-4206

## **IN SUPPORT OF HB 4776 [Rep. Will Guzzardi - Kelly Cassidy, Anne Stava-Murray and Terra Costa Howard]**

### **RIGHT-SIZING JUVENILE COMMITMENT To End Incarceration of Elementary School Children**

#### **What the bill does –**

Raises the age for commitment to the Dept. of Juvenile Justice from 13 to 14 because elementary school age children are better served with evidence based alternatives in the community.

#### **Why this is Needed -**

**Youth Correctional Leaders Support Age 14** because “It is much more effective and developmentally appropriate to address the behavior problems of young children outside of the legal system.”<sup>1</sup>

- **Children’s brains are still developing** – “Research on brain science and adolescent development consistently finds striking differences between youth aged 16 and older versus those 14 and below, leaving the younger children far less able to understand their proceedings and participate fairly in the court process.”
- **Removing young children from home and exposing them to detention/confinement can cause serious trauma** with lasting negative consequences.
- **Racial disparities are profound** - low income children of color are more likely to be confined than white children.

#### **IF not confined, how can young children be held accountable?**

**Community alternatives to commitment to IDJJ that are evidence-based and individualized** have proven more effective than IDJJ commitment, as evidenced by the success of Redeploy Illinois. Examples of evidence-based programs that work include **multi-systemic therapy (MST)** that works with child & family to address underlying issues ranging from education to transportation/housing, and behavioral healthcare.

**NUMBERS are LOW - Harm is Profound** - Fewer than 6 commitments/year of 13 year-old children to IDJJ statewide over the past 5 years. None for murder.

**SUPPORTERS** include the **Cook County Justice Advisory Council**, the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender, Restore Justice, **TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities)**, **ACLU of Illinois**, Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice, **PTA of Illinois**, Illinois Prison Project Action Fund, Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of Illinois, Strengthening Chicago’s Youth, Mothers Against Wrongful Convictions, Children’s Best Interest Project, and the James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://yclj.org/minimum-age>