

MEDIA ALERT

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ILLINOIS ABOLISHES LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE SENTENCES FOR CHILDREN; LEGISLATORS INTRODUCE BILL TO MAKE YOUTHFUL PAROLE RETROACTIVE

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Governor JB Pritzker signed Public Act 102-1128 ([House Bill 1064](#)) into law on Friday, February 10, abolishing life without the possibility of parole sentences for children in Illinois. This makes Illinois the 26th state (plus Washington D.C.) to end the use of these sentences for people younger than 18. Illinois' law also makes our state a leader in sentencing reform by recognizing young people's brain development and ensuring most people 18-20 are parole-eligible. Governor Pritzker signed the measure the same week legislators introduced a bill to make youthful parole retroactive.

"This has to be my proudest professional moment. Being a former 'juvenile lifer' and being part of an amazing team that pushed this legislation, it is so rewarding to know that legislators understand children can change and become productive members of society," Restore Justice Program Director Wendell Robinson said.

Public Act 102-1128 builds on the [2019 Youthful Parole Law](#), which created the first new parole opportunities in Illinois since our state abolished parole in 1978. The most recent law extends parole review to young people sentenced to natural life in prison; this ensures no children 17 and younger can receive a life without parole sentence.

"Today, I am proud to be an Illinoisan. In Illinois, we care about our children. Recognizing that young people can grow and change recognizes their humanity; it is an act of mercy and kindness. Thank you Governor Pritzker and the Illinois legislators on both sides of the aisle that supported it," said Julie Anderson, Restore Justice's Outreach Director. Anderson's son originally received a life without parole sentence for a youthful conviction.

Public Act 102-1128 passed with bipartisan support. In the House, Representatives Rita Mayfield (D-Waukegan) and Seth Lewis (R-Bartlett) sponsored the measure. "Even when a crime is particularly severe, it should be recognized that a legal minor with their whole life still ahead has the potential to be reformed," Representative Mayfield said. "That's why granting eligibility for a parole hearing after 40 years for those who are sentenced to life imprisonment before the age of 21 is the right thing to do. I recognize that victims and their

families may have concerns, and I don't blame them. However, in a nation like ours, prison should be a place where people have the opportunity to transform themselves and become better people and productive members of society. I believe that giving everyone a chance at redemption is a moral duty.”

Senate President Don Harmon (D-Oak Park) moved the measure through his chamber and also sponsored the 2019 Youthful Parole Law. “It’s a sliver of hope for an otherwise condemned person under 21 who maybe, just maybe, might redeem themselves decades down the road and warrant consideration for a second chance at society,” President Harmon said after the bill passed through the Senate.

On the Senate floor, Senator Donald DeWitte (R-St. Charles) spoke forcefully in favor of redemption. “I consider myself a law-and-order Republican, but I also believe in rehabilitation. I believe there are some people who make extremely poor decisions in the very early portions of their lives who deserve consideration once they have met benchmarks and shown they are prepared to become contributing citizens after they have served their debt to society. For these people, we need to offer them hope and let them know we recognize that people can redeem themselves,” Senator DeWitte said.

“This new law builds on the national momentum to ensure no children or young adults are sentenced to die in prison without the opportunity to return home. Everyone deserves the opportunity for grace and redemption. No child should spend their life in prison,” Restore Justice Policy Director Rev. Lindsey Hammond said.

Also last week, now-Senator Seth Lewis introduced [Senate Bill 2073](#). This bill would make the 2019 and 2023 youthful parole laws retroactive. If signed into law, SB 2073 would allow 523 people who are currently incarcerated the opportunity to immediately seek parole consideration. In total, 3,253 people (including the above 523) currently incarcerated people would be eligible for parole consideration at some future point in time.

Restore Justice, which comprises [Restore Justice Foundation](#) and [Restore Justice Illinois](#), works to address issues faced by those serving life or de-facto life sentences, their families, and their communities. Founded in 2015 by a dedicated group of advocates that included the late former Congressman, Federal Judge, and White House Counsel Abner Mikva, Restore Justice trains and supports advocates, conducts research, nurtures partnerships, and develops policy solutions that will roll back ineffective, punishment-based policies of the past, replacing them with compassionate, smart, and safe policies for the future.