

MEDIA ALERT

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Illinois Law Abolishing Life Without Parole Sentences for Children & Young Adults Takes Effect

On January 1, 2024, Public Act 102-1128 takes effect, prospectively abolishing life without parole sentences for most people 20 and younger in Illinois. This law (previously House Bill 1064) makes Illinois the 26th state to abolish life without parole sentences for children 17 and younger. This new law also makes our state a leader in sentencing reform by recognizing brain development and children's unique capacity for change.

Governor JB Pritzker signed Public Act 102-1128 into law in February. The legislation expands on the 2019 Youthful Parole Law, which created the first new parole opportunities in Illinois since 1978; the Youthful Parole Law ensured most children and young adults under age 21 given long terms of incarceration would have the opportunity to go before the Prisoner Review Board after 10 or 20 years, depending on the crime for which they were convicted. That legislation exempted young people sentenced to natural life. The 2023 law extends parole consideration to these people; they can petition for a parole review after serving at least 40 years.

"HB 1064 simply ensures that young people serving extreme sentences will have the opportunity to have a review and be judged on who they have become and how they have grown and changed since their incarceration. All young people deserve this chance to reunite with their families," said James Swansey, Restore Justice's Policy Manager. James originally received a life without parole sentence for a crime that occurred when he was 17 years old; two other men on Restore Justice's staff and two members of our Board of Directors also had juvenile life without parole sentences. They are home today because of court decisions.

Public Act 102-1128 passed with bipartisan support. In the House, Representatives Rita Mayfield (D-Waukegan) and Seth Lewis (R-Bartlett) sponsored the measure. Senate President Don Harmon (D-Oak Park) sponsored the bill in his chamber and credited Restore Justice's advocacy with ensuring the bill's passage.

"This is a case of tenacious advocacy, not by high-paid lawyers, but by citizens who came and shared their stories with all of us. Not just ordinary citizens; in this case, it is primarily on men who spent decades in jail without any hope. They spoke to you all,

you asked me to call the bill. It was members of the Democratic caucus and, to my delight, it was members of the Republican caucus,” Harmon said.

Restore Justice is now advocating to make the 2019 and 2023 parole bills retroactive so people already incarcerated have the same opportunities to come home. Earlier this year, Senator Lewis introduced Senate Bill 2073, which would extend parole consideration to people sentenced between 1978 (the year Illinois abolished parole) and 2019.

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 pro-punishment policies of the past, replacing them with compassionate, smart, and safe policies for the future.