

MEDIA ALERT

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Representative Theresa Mah Gives Hope to People Sentenced as Children and Youth

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On Friday, February 7, Representative Theresa Mah introduced [House Bill 3332](#). The bill would create a limited opportunity for people 20 and younger at the time of their offense to petition the court for their sentence to be reviewed.

Restore Justice recently released a report, [More Than a Conviction: Stories of Children Sentenced to Life Without Parole in Illinois](#). This report highlights firsthand journeys of transformation and success, underscoring the urgent need for reform. It concludes that sentencing should be about changing people, not just punishing them. Everyone is more than their worst mistake; people can change and successfully reintegrate into the community.

Currently, people serving life or extremely long sentences have few meaningful opportunities to have their cases reviewed since Illinois [abolished parole](#) in 1978 and enacted so-called [“truth-in sentencing”](#) in 1998, limiting opportunities for people to earn reentry or time off their sentence.

“I have met a number of people incarcerated in our Department of Corrections from a young age who have genuinely become mature, educated, completely rehabilitated people who could be contributing members of society if given an opportunity,” said Representative Mah. “The current system is in need of reform, especially in light of what we know now about brain development and also the fact that our system of “corrections” really does not afford many opportunities for rehabilitated people to be considered for release.”

HB 3332 would build on recent [bipartisan reforms](#) recognizing children's and young people's brain development and unique capacity to mature and change. Data shows [extremely low recidivism rates](#) for people convicted as youth and released as adults. This bill would create a pathway for people sentenced as children and young adults to show that they have been rehabilitated and return home to give back to the community.

“No one should be defined for their whole life by one mistake. Illinois needs this retroactive reform because people deserve a chance to show who they have become,” said Restore Justice Policy Manager James Swansey. Swansey originally received a life

without parole sentence at the age of 17. He received a new sentence after U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

HB 3332 is a fair, cost-effective, age-appropriate way to ensure children and young adults are held accountable for the harm they have caused while offering them an opportunity to redeem themselves.

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.