



Time to Raise the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction ***'Youth can do some really stupid things in life. We don't need to respond stupidly when they do.'***

Several years ago, when I was still in the pastorate, I counseled a wayward teen. I told her, "Young lady, at this point in your life you are making decisions that will most likely affect you for the rest of your life. The irony is that at your age you are not wise enough to make these decisions, and the tragedy of the situation is that by the time you've sufficiently matured it could be too late."

There is scientific evidence for this assertion. *The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* argues that there's a biological reason teens often don't think through circumstances and consider the consequences of their actions. Their brains haven't amply developed. Studies have shown the frontal cortex, the area of the brain which controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This area is still maturing and evolving during the teen years, and even into early adulthood.

This doesn't mean youth can't make good decisions or discern between good and evil. Neither does it mean they aren't morally responsible for their behavior. But it does mean that parents, teachers, authority figures, and even policy makers, should be aware of this mitigating factor when dealing with them.

The Holy Scriptures teach that justice requires proportionality. In other words, there should be different kinds and degrees of punishment for offenders of the law. It is not proportional, sensible or moral that our state's criminal justice system treats 16 and 17-year-olds as adults when they commit minor, low-level crimes. It results in far more drastic and permanent consequences for them.

Moreover, the family is of paramount importance to God. Laws that undermine the family harm society. Our current law cuts parents out of the process, denying them a chance to intervene and help their teen in a time of crisis. Cases against them can proceed to completion with no parental involvement or input. Rather than ending up in the juvenile system where both parents and authorities can work together in addressing the problems at the root of the teen's criminal activity, these youngsters are hauled off into an adult system that almost guarantees they become "twice the child of hell" they may be already.

Our state's youth are our most priceless asset. Far too long the current law has been in place, and it's time for our state to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction.

Yes, youth can do some really stupid things in life. That's why we don't need to respond stupidly when they do.

This being said, I believe, HB 280 – Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act, is the morally right thing to do. It considers the mitigating factors of youth. It's proportional justice. It's pro-family.

Let's safeguard our collective future by passing this legislation.

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