



House Bill 440 – Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility to 18

Georgia is ***one of only three states*** in which a 17-year-old is charged, tried, and sentenced as an adult, regardless of the severity of his or her offense. Georgia can ***promote public safety, improve outcomes for youth, and save money by raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18.***

Raising the age will promote public safety.

- ❖ According to the Georgia Crime Information Center, juvenile arrests in Georgia have been declining since 2008, and the vast majority of offenses committed by 17-year-olds are misdemeanors.¹
- ❖ 17-year-olds who are tried as juveniles are 34% less likely to reoffend than those adjudicated in the adult system.²
- ❖ The juvenile justice system can hold 17-year-olds accountable for their actions through restitution to victims, mandatory school attendance, community-based rehabilitation, and restrictive custody when necessary.
- ❖ 17-year-olds who commit serious violent offenses will continue to be tried as adults under Georgia’s direct file law (commonly referred to as “SB 440”).

Raising the age will improve youth outcomes.

- ❖ In the adult system: 17-year-olds are more likely to be the victims of violence and sexual assault, more likely to commit suicide, and more likely to reoffend.³
- ❖ In the juvenile justice system: 17-year-olds can receive the support they need to be rehabilitated and return to their communities.

With these supports and without the stigma of a criminal record, 17-year-olds will have better education and career prospects, which promotes stronger and safer communities.

Raising the age will be cost-effective.

- ❖ Though additional spending may be required initially, raising the age has allowed states to down-size their juvenile justice systems as a result of reduced recidivism.⁴
- ❖ Factoring in indirect benefits resulting from reduced recidivism and increased lifetime earnings, society can regain millions of dollars for every 17-year-old who adjudicated in juvenile court instead of in superior court.⁵

Support Improved Public Safety and Better Outcomes for Georgia’s Youth. **Support House Bill 440.**

¹ Uniform Crime Reporting, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Crime Statistics Summary Reports, <https://gbi.georgia.gov/services/crime-statistics>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Effects on Violence of Laws & Policies Facilitating the Transfer of Youth from the Juvenile to the Adult Justice System,” 7 (2007).

³ Campaign for Youth Justice, “Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America” (2007).

⁴ Both Connecticut and Illinois have seen decreased juvenile arrests and have closed juvenile facilities since raising the age. Louisiana Youth Justice Coalition, “Raise the Age: Support SB 324,” 1 (2016); Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, “Raising the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction” 6 (2013).

⁵ Mark A. Cohen, “New Evidence on the Monetary Value of Saving a High-Risk Youth,” (2007).