



Investing in Youth Today, Improving Conditions Tomorrow

Opinion: MCCOY Opposes Senate Bill 279

March 15, 2019

The mission of Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc. (MCCOY) is to champion the positive development of youth, providing leadership on key issues and strengthening and supporting the organizations and individuals who work with youth. Our vision is that every young person in our community has the opportunity to grow into a positive, productive, and contributing citizen.

Part of growing up is making mistakes. Growing up without positive support and guidance can mean those mistakes are serious and even grievous. When we fail, there are consequences that result, but there can also be learning, atonement, change, and growth - all goals of the juvenile justice system.

The juvenile court system was established in the United States more than a century ago, with the first court appearing in Illinois in 1899. Prior to that time, children and youth were considered "miniature adults" and thus tried and punished as adults. Now, the primary goals of the juvenile justice system, in addition to maintaining public safety, are life skill development, rehabilitation, treating unaddressed emotional and mental health needs, and successful reintegration of youth into the community.

Our ancestors were very wise. Without the benefit of modern research that has proven that punishing children as if they were adults causes irreparable damages, they saw that treating children who commit crimes, even serious ones, as adults did nothing but harm to the child and, ultimately, to society. Studies have shown that children prosecuted as adults re-offend sooner, more often, and in more violent ways than their counterparts. Youth in the adult prison system are [36 times more likely to commit suicide than in juvenile facilities](#). They are also [five times more likely to be victims of violence or sexual abuse while in custody](#).

[Senate Bill 279](#), currently under consideration of the House Courts and Criminal Code Committee, would roll back the progress we have made in our treatment of children who make serious mistakes and commit serious crimes. Placing them in the adult criminal justice system would effectively remove any opportunity for life skill development, rehabilitation, treatment of emotional trauma, and long-term life success. This legislation would also disproportionately and negatively impact youth of color and/or youth in poverty, further derailing them from becoming contributing members of society.



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The juvenile system was put in place to help young people move forward through rehabilitation so that they can re-enter society having learned from their mistakes. By denying children the opportunity to have the resources that are offered through the juvenile court system, we are effectively writing them off as hopeless and abandoning them during one of the most formative chapters of their lives.

MCCOY believes in the power of prevention through rehabilitation and that regardless of their mistakes, all young people deserve the opportunity to receive the treatment, education, and support that the juvenile court system offers during the time that they most need it. We join the [Children's Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana \(CPLI\)](#) and oppose [Senate Bill 279](#).

About MCCOY

The Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc. (MCCOY) is the youth services intermediary for central Indiana whose mission is to champion the positive development of youth through leadership on key issues and support of the youth worker community. MCCOY's vision is that every young person in central Indiana has opportunities to thrive, learn, engage and contribute.

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