

# HILL ALERT



## DUE PROCESS

INSTITUTE

### **Vote NO on District of Columbia Juvenile Sentencing Reform Act, H.R. 5140**

Due Process Institute urges members to vote **NO** on the District of Columbia Juvenile Sentencing Reform Act, H.R. 5140. The bill would lower the age for juveniles to be tried as an adult to 14 years of age.

Recently, the House Oversight and Government Reform (OGR) Committee marked up several bills that are, put simply, an unfortunate act of partisan politics. In August, the FBI released crime figures for 2024, which showed that violent crime is at its lowest point since 1969. Property crime is at its lowest point since 1968. Although we agree that one instance of violent crime is too much, we also believe that lawmakers have a responsibility to legislate in light of data and the truth is, violent crime and property crime are way down. Few would deny that crime in the District of Columbia remains a concern for those who live here. However, the bills recently marked up by OGR ignore the fact that the District of Columbia has made substantial progress, with crime dropping to a 30-year low in 2024. (Unproven allegations of data manipulation shouldn't resonate for anyone wishing to make good policy decisions.) These bills also deny that violent crime rates are far higher than D.C.'s in several cities in traditionally Republican states, including Memphis (2,501.3 violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants), Houston (1,148.2), Nashville (1,041.1), and Tulsa (925.9).

We recognize that juveniles are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime in the District. However, we also recognize that science explains that a human's brain is not fully developed until a person reaches their mid-20s, which is why juvenile law treats children differently from adults. Additionally, the body of available research shows us that incarcerating juveniles only *increases* the likelihood of recidivism, leads to antisocial behavior, and continues to weaken social bonds. Lawmakers considering a yes vote would do well to research the [“Kids for cash” scandal in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania](#). Exposure to even a juvenile detention facility ruined many of these children's lives. In the 2014 documentary named after the scandal, one of the children reports trying marijuana and heroin for the first time in a juvenile facility and learning how to commit other offenses during his incarceration there. Another child developed anger issues that set off a chain of events that resulted in him taking his own life. Kids in adult facilities fair far worse.

A stark example of the harm that comes from inappropriate treating children like adults in the criminal legal system is the [story of Kalief Browder](#), who, beginning at the age of 16, was held without trial on Rikers Island for three years. Browder spent approximately

two years in solitary confinement, where he was exposed to violence at the hands of corrections officers and fellow inmates. Browder was released in May 2013. He was never convicted of a crime, despite his three-year stay on Rikers. During his incarceration, Browder attempted suicide at least three times during his incarceration. Suffering from depression, he made additional attempts after his release. Sadly, Browder lost his struggle with depression in June 2015.

We implore lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to understand that there are significantly better ways to address crime committed by juveniles than voting yes on this bill. This includes investing in after-school, drug treatment, therapy, mental health, mentoring, and tutoring programs. Exposing minors to the adult corrections system will only serve to do significantly more damage than it will provide benefits to our public safety.

**Due Process Institute encourages all Members to vote NO on the District of Columbia Juvenile Sentencing Reform Act, H.R. 5140.**

*Due Process Institute is a bipartisan nonprofit that works to honor, preserve, and restore principles of fairness in the criminal legal system. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Vice President, Jason Pye at [jason@idueprocess.org](mailto:jason@idueprocess.org).*