

Toolkit for Raise the Age Faith Leaders

Week of Action: January 13th – 22nd

Dear Faith Leader,

Thank you for participating in the Week of Action for Raise the Age. Clergy from different faith traditions and denominations across Westchester County will focus attention on educating their congregations and taking action to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York during a week of action from 1/13-1/22. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend (1/13-1/15) will serve as the kick off.

The 2017 New York State legislative session will begin in early January. Our elected officials must hear loudly and clearly from their constituents that it is an injustice to continue to automatically treat all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system in New York. It is a moral imperative that they raise the age of criminal responsibility this session. We are calling you, our partners in the faith community, to help us deliver this message.

This toolkit is designed to provide you with all the information you need to participate in whatever capacity you are able. We understand different congregations may participate in only one or two of the suggested activities and are happy to have you join the campaign as fits with your work. **Confirm your participation to Sarah** (syergeau@wca4kids.org) **by Wednesday, January 11th.**

Please customize any of the enclosed sample documents to better reflect your faith tradition.

- **Sample text for bulletin, newsletter or e-mail:** pages 2-3
- **Advocacy letter & suggestions for collecting letters:** pages 4-5
- **Themes & data about raise the age to include in worship message:** pages 6-7
- **How to write an op-ed to your local newspaper:** pages 8-10
- **Sample social media posts & images:** page 11

This is an opportunity to put your faith into action to meet the needs of young people who are exposed to harm, not provided necessary age appropriate support through the adult criminal justice system, and who are more likely to return to the justice system in the future compared to youth treated in the juvenile justice system.

Let's make 2017 the year comprehensive raise the age legislation is passed in New York.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Sarah at 914-946-7676 ext. 308 or syergeau@wca4kids.org.

Thank you for your partnership.

Westchester Children's Association

Sample text for bulletin, newsletter or e-mail

Feature your participation in the Week of Action or information about the Raise the Age campaign in an upcoming bulletin, newsletter or e-mail to your congregation. 3 sample articles are below, please customize as necessary. A formatted handout for use as an insert is also included on the next page.

Upcoming Week of Action for Raise the Age: Later this month we'll be celebrating the Week of Action for Raise the Age, along with many other faith communities in Westchester County. New York is one of two states that automatically prosecutes all youth as adults starting at age 16. We're part of this effort because youth in Westchester, and throughout the state, are hurting, and they need us to stand up for them. The Week of Action is an opportunity for us to pray, learn about, and act on raising the age of criminal responsibility for our youth.

Did you know:

- When 16- or 17-year olds are arrested, their parents are not required to be notified of the arrest or present during questioning of the teens.
- 68% of the crimes committed by 16- and 17- year-olds in Westchester in 2015 were misdemeanors.
- The adult criminal justice system does not focus on rehabilitation and youth do not have access to age-appropriate interventions. Raising the age holds youth accountable for their actions in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- New York's law is still in place despite research that has demonstrated that this practice jeopardizes public safety by increasing recidivism rates. Youth who go through the adult justice system are more likely to be rearrested than youth who go through the juvenile justice system.
- Youth who are held in adult facilities are subjected to high rates of violence and victimizations. They may also have a criminal record which can result in lifetime barriers to employment, higher education and housing.

Urge New York to Raise the Age! On the weekend of January *[pick either 13-15 or 20-22]*, *[insert congregation name]* will be joining congregations from many faith traditions in Westchester in celebrating the Week of Action for Raise the Age. We live in one of only two states that automatically prosecutes all youth as adults starting at age 16. It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 18. This is a special opportunity to pray, and to take action on behalf of our youth and to strengthen our communities.

Why should New York "raise the age"? Did you know that New York is one of two states that automatically prosecutes all 16- and 17-year olds as adults? This means when a 16- or 17-year-old is arrested their parents aren't called, youth are questioned by police without their parents, they are held in adult facilities and can get a criminal record that results in lifetime barriers to employment, higher education and housing. In Westchester, over 700 16- and 17-year-olds were arrested in 2015. 68% of the crimes committed by 16- and 17- year-olds in Westchester in 2015 were misdemeanors.

Comprehensive raise the age would raise the age of criminal responsibility to 18 and hold youth accountable in an age-appropriate manner. The adult criminal justice system does not focus on rehabilitation and youth do not have access to supports and interventions needed to become successful. Youth who go through the juvenile justice system have lower re-arrest rates than those who are processed through the adult criminal justice system.

Take action to support raise the age reform in New York by sending a letter to your elected officials here: bit.ly/RTA-act or by joining our congregation's letter writing campaign on *[XX date]*.

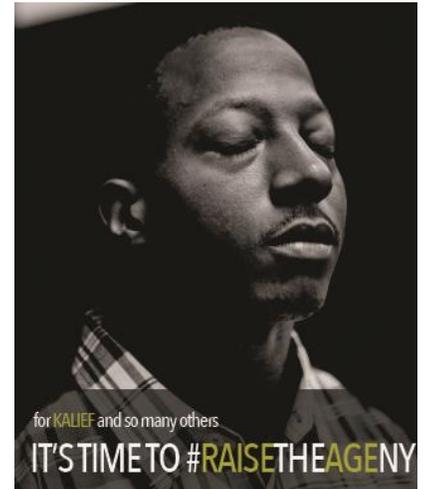
RAISE the AGE | NY

#RaisetheAgeNY Campaign Action Guide 2017

Did you know that New York is one of only two states where all young people ages 16 and 17 are automatically treated as adults in the criminal justice system, regardless of the severity of the offense?

Research proves that this approach jeopardizes public safety and has long-term negative consequences on the outcomes for youth, as compared to those in the juvenile justice system.

Last year, nearly **30,000** 16- and 17-year-olds were arrested in New York State and processed in the adult justice system – over 70% were arrested for misdemeanors. After their arrest, there is no requirement that their parents be notified, or that a parent or guardian be present during questioning. These young people are held in adult jails, and if convicted, they face barriers resulting from their criminal conviction for the rest of their lives.

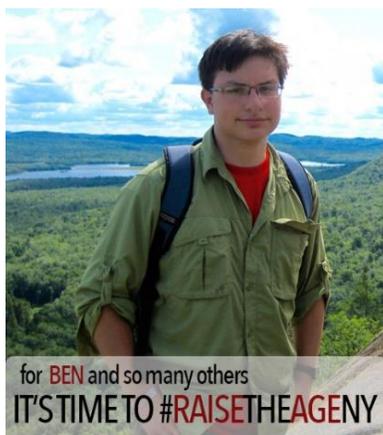


TAKE ACTION: You can help change this antiquated law!

Together, we can make 2017 the year we get comprehensive legislation passed. It's time to stand up and do what's right for every young person and every community in our state.

Use our Online Action Alert: Send a letter to Governor Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Majority Leader Flanagan, IDC Leader Jeff Klein, and your own state representatives urging them to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York. Visit RaisetheAgeNY.com and click on Take Action or use this link: bit.ly/RTA-act

Join our Monthly Call-In Days for Justice: Call your elected officials on the 16th of every month in 2017, to remind legislators that New York is one of only two states that automatically prosecutes ALL 16-year-olds as adults, and we must change this. With this one-click alert, enter your address to get the numbers for your representatives and a script you can use to call them: bit.ly/rta2017.



Stay Connected to the Statewide Campaign

- Visit <http://www.RaisetheAgeNY.com> for news, updates and more ways to take action.
- Like us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/RaisetheAgeNY>
- Follow us on Twitter: [@RaiseTheAgeNY](https://twitter.com/RaiseTheAgeNY) and via the hashtag [#RaisetheAgeNY](https://twitter.com/RaisetheAgeNY)
- Have a story to share? Want to schedule a free training? Contact us at NYRaiseTheAge@gmail.com

Advocacy Letter & Suggestions for Collecting Letters

We encourage you to undertake a letter writing campaign with your congregation in support of passing comprehensive raise the age legislation in 2017. Our goal is to collect 1,000 letters from the Westchester faith community. Letters can be collected electronically by having congregants go to bit.ly/RTA-act or through hard copies. **Hard copy letters should not be taken home and mailed.** All hard copy letters must be delivered to Sarah Yergeau at Westchester Children's Association (470 Mamaroneck Ave, Suite 304, White Plains, NY 10605) by **Wednesday, January 25th**. All letters will be copied and mailed to legislators after January 25th. If you have any issues, contact Sarah: syergeau@wca4kids.org.

Suggestions for collecting signed letters*

1. There are many ways you can collect signed letters. Some suggestions:
 - a. Set up a letter-signing table and use signs and anything else you have available (Food? Balloons? Kids?) to attract people to the table.
 - b. Have lots of volunteers with blank letters, clipboards & pens approaching people (it's great to have teens do this!) to invite them to sign.
 - c. Place the blank letters and pens on the chairs or in the pews, and invite people to sign them in the homily, message, time for announcements, minute for ministry, etc.
 - d. Collect letters through specific committees or ministries (i.e. Men's Group, Youth Group, etc.) during their regular meeting times.
2. Have lots of blank letters and pens available!
3. If you are staffing a table, have 3 – 4 "stations" on the table, so more than one person can sign at a time. Each station should have blank letters and pens.
4. Consider blowing up a copy of the letter and hang it prominently so that people can read it as they wait to sign.
5. Clearly communicate that the letters should **NOT** be taken home and mailed – they should be returned to the letter table (or person collecting) and they will be compiled, counted and copies will be delivered to Governor Cuomo, Senator Flanagan, Senator Klein, Senator Stewart-Cousins and Assemblyman Heastie.
6. Clearly mark where completed letters go, perhaps in a box or separate table (to remind people of #5 – letters should not be mailed!).
7. Have couples sign separately to increase the number of letters you collect. Our goal is to collect 1,000 letters from the Westchester faith community.
8. If people ask if they have to include their home address, let them know that the information will not be shared outside of Westchester Children's Association (except for the Governor, Senators and Assemblyman) and that it is important to verify that they live in New York State.
9. If people ask how they can learn more or get involved, direct them to sign up for e-mail updates from Westchester Children's Association at wca4kids.org or visit raisetheageny.com.

**Instruction guide adapted with permission from The Children's Agenda.*

January 2017

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable John J Flanagan
Senate Majority Leader
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Carl Heastie
Assembly Speaker
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Jeffrey D Klein
Senate Coalition Leader
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Democratic Conference Leader
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Flanagan, Speaker Heastie, Senator Klein and Senator Stewart-Cousins:

I urge you to **raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 this session**. Currently, New York is one of two states where youth as young as 16 automatically end up in adult courts, jails and prisons.

Passing comprehensive raise the age reforms will enhance public safety and offer youth age-appropriate interventions (including, when necessary, incarceration). Adult prisons and jails do not focus on rehabilitation and are not designed to meet the needs of youth.

Research has proven that the adolescent's brain is not fully developed until they are in their 20s. This is why youth are sometimes more impulsive -- and also why youth are more receptive to rehabilitative services.

Treating children as adults in the criminal justice system is short-sighted and ineffective. Our current law sets young people up to become re-offenders: research has shown that young people who go through the adult system are much more likely to re-offend than those in the juvenile system. It is critical for New York to ensure that youth involved in the justice system are provided with court processes, services, and placement facilities that are developmentally appropriate.

Please pass comprehensive raise the age legislation with funding for implementation and services for youth in 2017.

Respectfully,

Name (Please print. A signature is not necessary)

Home Street Address

Home City, State Zip Code

Themes & data to include in worship message

Included in this section are suggested themes and data about Raise the Age to incorporate in a worship message. Please customize to fit with your worship service.

General data:

- New York is one of only two states that automatically treats all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. North Carolina is the other. 5 other states set the age at 17¹. New York also has one of the lowest ages of juvenile delinquency, which is set at age 7².
- 724 16- and 17- year-olds were arrested in Westchester in 2015; About 34,000 16- and 17-year-olds are arrested each year in New York State³
 - In Westchester: 68% of the arrests were misdemeanors; 16% non-violent felonies; 15% violent felonies³
 - There are always exceptions in the case of more violent crimes (just as there currently are now for youth under the age of 16) but these are not the vast majority of crimes.
- Differences between juvenile and adult criminal justice system⁴:
 - Juvenile system emphasizes rehabilitation and provides age-appropriate supports, interventions and services for youth whereas those resources are limited in the adult system
 - When youth are arrested as adults, their parents do not need to be notified and they can be questioned by police without an adult present
 - Being arrested as an adult can lead to a criminal record that can limit access to employment, higher education and housing
 - Smart on crime: Raising the age is not “a slap on the wrist”, it’s comprehensive legislation that holds youth accountable for their crime in an age appropriate manner. Requirements of Family Court are often more demanding and extensive for the young person.
- Racial disparities in arrest vs. incarceration rates:
 - Using data that excludes NYC from 2010: The majority (52.5%) of 16- & 17-year-olds arrested were white and 33.2% of those arrested were black. Yet, the majority of 16- & 17-year-olds incarcerated were black (52.2%) and 33.2% of 16- and 17-year-olds incarcerated were white⁵. The percentages flip between arrest and incarceration.

4 Major Arguments for Raise the Age:

1. Brain Science: Recent research has shown that the brain is still developing until age 25. The last part of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex which regulates impulse control & decision-making⁶. The flip side of brain development is that youth are more receptive to

change and are primed for alternatives and interventions if we have the resources to provide them⁷. These types of interventions are more widely available in the juvenile justice system.

2. **Impact on Youth:** Youth are held in adult facilities when arrested in as adults (i.e. Riker's Island if arrested in NYC). Youth placed with adults instead of juveniles much more likely to be subjected to violence: They are 2 times more likely to be physically harmed by staff⁸; 5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted⁹ and 36 times more likely to commit suicide¹⁰
3. **Financial:** There are more costs upfront because comprehensive legislation is putting more investment into services, diversion and supervision but there are long term savings because of reduced recidivism. Connecticut, which was the last state to raise the age from 16, saw \$2 million in cost savings in the first year of full implementation¹¹. Connecticut has closed a juvenile detention facility after RTA and in 2016 their governor proposed raising the age to 21. The proposed legislation in New York in 2016 included 100% reimbursement to counties for services to youth as a result of raise the age implementation.
4. **Public Safety:** Comprehensive raise the age legislation holds youth accountable with developmentally appropriate consequences for their actions. The current system results in high re-arrest numbers: 1/3 more felony re-arrests for youth processed through adult criminal justice system as opposed to youth retained in the juvenile justice system¹². Another study found about 80% of juveniles released from adult facilities will re-offend and often committing more serious crimes¹³. Most 16-and 17-year-olds are coming back to our communities so we should provide supports & services that help give them a second chance.

Footnotes:

¹ "Should Texas Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility", Texas House of Representatives. House Research Organization, October 25, 2016.

<http://www.hro.house.state.tx.us/pdf/focus/ageofcriminalresponsibility.pdf>

² Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics, Jurisdictional Boundaries. <http://www.jjgps.org/jurisdictional-boundaries#age-boundaries>

³ New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, Computerized Criminal History system (as of 2/9/2016).

<http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ojsa/youth-arrests/index.htm>

⁴ Raise the Age New York Comparison of the Youth Justice System and Adult Justice System in New York State. Retrieved from:

<http://raisetheagency.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Comparison-of-NYS-Juvenile-and-Adult-Justice-Systems.pdf>

⁵ Criminal Justice Case Processing of 16-17 Year Olds. Prepared by New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services, Office of Justice Research and Performance, January 4, 2013.

⁶ MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. Issue Brief #3: Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence, http://www.adjj.org/downloads/6093issue_brief_3.pdf.

⁷ Brief for the American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, National Association of Social Workers, and Mental Health America as Amici Curiae, *Graham v. Florida*, 130 S. Ct. 2011 (2010), <http://www.apa.org/about/offices/ogc/amicus/graham-v-florida-sullivan.pdf>

⁸ Fagen, J., Forst, M. Vivona, T.S. "Youth in Prisons and Training Schools: Perceptions and Consequences of the Treatment-Custody Dichotomy", *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, No.2, 1989.

⁹ National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, Report 18, June 2009, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/226680.pdf>

¹⁰ "Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America", Campaign for Youth Justice, November 2007.

¹¹ "Juvenile Justice Reform in Connecticut: How Collaboration and Commitment Have Improved Public Safety and Outcomes for Youth", Juvenile Justice Policy Institute, February 2013 http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/jpi_juvenile_justice_reform_in_ct.pdf

¹² Effects on Violence of Laws and Policies Facilitating the Transfer of Youth from the Juvenile to the Adult Justice System: Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 30, 2007, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5609a1.htm>

¹³ National Campaign to Reform State Juvenile Justice Systems. The Fourth Wave: Juvenile Justice Reforms for the Twenty-first Century; p. 20, <http://raisetheagency.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Fourth-Wave.pdf>

Instructions for writing an op-ed to your local paper

Op-eds are your chance to speak through the news media directly to policymakers, your constituents, and other target audiences. It is important for you to make the case as to why your voice should be included, by providing a persuasive argument that is timely. **The Value, Problem, Solution, Action** is a useful way to formulate drafting a persuasive op-ed.

Be sure to check the guidelines of your local paper. Guidelines are usually included on their websites, with information about desired length and how to submit. Generally, papers in Westchester prefer an op-ed that is 400-600 words in length. It is important to follow their guidelines closely, both to avoid the risk of rejection over technicalities and unwarranted editing due to length. Not all local Westchester papers have a website, so you might have to call to ask for this information.

Below is an op-ed by Alan Jenkins, Director of The Opportunity Agenda, a social justice communications organization. Alongside it are the guidelines, noted above, that each section of the op-ed reflects. The example op-ed is 377 words in length.

Dallas Morning News

Op-ed: Media distortions and the Trayvon Martin case

By Alan Jenkins

March 29, 2012

The mainstream media have played a mostly positive role in covering the tragic and senseless killing of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed 17-year-old African-American boy shot to death by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida. After a slow start, reporters have uncovered new facts and asked tough questions.

To their credit, the media have largely covered Trayvon's grieving and outraged parents with the dignity and humanity they deserve. They have also interviewed community residents, largely white, who have spoken out with grief and outrage over the incident.

A timely intro. Draw the reader in with a reference to current events, a quick anecdote or metaphor that helps set the stage for the point you want to make. You can mention that the time draws near for the opening of another legislative session and how Cuomo has included statements in support of RTA in the last two SoS speeches.

Shared values. Here Jenkins leads with the common human experience of loss, and the value of dignity with which we all want to be treated. You can refer here to the values of the faith-based community, of which many elected officials are apart.

<p>But the media, both news and popular, have also had a hand in creating the mind-set that leads to tragedies like this one, based on the facts currently available. A new report by The Opportunity Agenda reviewing a decade of research finds that media depictions of black men and boys are too frequently distorted in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to discriminatory treatment.</p>	<p>Frame the problem as a threat to values. A lack of human and dignified treatment of black men and boys is the problem here. You can talk about how draconian laws are impacting youth who deserve a ‘second chance.’” And how this disproportionately impacts youth of color.</p>
<p>Those distorted depictions occur across almost all types of media, including news reporting, entertainment, advertising, and even video games. Repeated unbalanced media portrayals of black men and boys, the report finds, contribute to distorted perceptions, antagonism, and discriminatory treatment. They increase public support for punitive approaches to issues involving black males and increase public tolerance of racial inequality.</p>	<p>A central thesis. State your central point clearly and focus all supporting evidence on further illuminating it. Available in toolkit.</p>
<p>In particular, black men and boys are disproportionately depicted in news media as perpetrators of violent crime, when compared with actual arrest rates. They are underrepresented in the more sympathetic roles of victim and law enforcement officers.</p>	<p>Supporting evidence. The rule of threes applies to your supporting evidence, try to use three compelling examples, statistics, or anecdotes best supporting the thesis. Also see the toolkit.</p>
<p>To be sure, the mass media are not the only factor that shapes people’s conscious and subconscious beliefs and biases. But decades of research make clear that distorted media depictions persist and are among the contributing factors to tragedies like the one in Florida.</p>	<p>Acknowledge the opposition. A good tactic in outlining your argument is to acknowledge the main opposing argument to your point, thus addressing questions that may be running through the reader’s mind. Such as those who call for ‘law and order.’ How does RTA solve for that.</p>
<p>Fortunately, the mass media can also be part of the solution. Of course, the</p>	<p>Solution. Be sure to identify the steps that are needed to address the problem you</p>

responsibility is not the media's alone. But the media, as the public looking glass, can and should show the full spectrum of the lives of black men and boys. Media biases and their effects neither absolve nor convict George Zimmerman, who should answer to the legal system. But for most people, having the full picture will result in greater knowledge and fewer irrational fears of innocent black teenagers like Trayvon Martin.

describe, and who should take those steps. Clearly, this is where you talk about what people of faith and elected officials can do.

Closing. Leave the reader with something to ponder while reiterating your point one final time. It should be noted that the inclusion of forceful and creative introductions and closings should not preclude your main point. If a metaphor is too difficult to follow, or an anecdote focuses readers' attention on its details, your point is likely to be lost.

Sample Social Media Posts & Images



Follow Westchester Children’s Association on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at @wca4kids. Post messages in support of Raise the Age using #RaiseTheAgeNY. Sample tweets and Facebook posts are below.

Twitter

- New York is one of only two states that prosecute all 16- and 17- year-olds as adults. It's time to #RaiseTheAgeNY bit.ly/RTA-act
- Charging youth as adults actually hurts public safety. This is why we must #RaiseTheAgeNY. Take action: bit.ly/RTA-act
- A comprehensive approach to [#RaiseTheAge](https://www.raisetheage.org/) of criminal responsibility is in the best interest of New York’s children, youth, & communities. [#RaiseTheAgeNY](https://www.raisetheage.org/)

Facebook:

- New York is one of only two states that fail to recognize what research and science have confirmed – adolescents are children, and prosecuting and placing them in the adult criminal justice system doesn’t work for them and doesn’t work for public safety. It’s time to #RaiseTheAgeNY so 16-year-olds are not automatically prosecuted as adults. Join me in taking action: bit.ly/RTA-act
- [#RaiseTheAgeNY](https://www.raisetheage.org/) isn't just about giving youth rehabilitative supports so they can turn their lives around, it's also about making our communities safer. Youth in adult facilities are 34% more likely to be re-arrested for a felony than youth who are placed in juvenile facilities. The time is now to Raise the Age. bit.ly/RTA-act

Images: right-click on image to save and use in tweets or Facebook post

