

May 10, 2016

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

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Flanagan and Speaker Heastie:

As faith leaders from many backgrounds, traditions and beliefs, we write to you united by our great concern for the future of children in our communities. Too many are being swept up into the adult criminal justice system and getting trapped in a cycle of poverty and crime. We all know children who have faced down difficult circumstances and rebuilt their lives. But the lack of age-appropriate interventions for 16- and 17-year olds in the adult system, as well as the heightened exposure they face to violence and abuse, is making it difficult and in many cases impossible for even the most intelligent and capable teens to become productive and successful members of our communities.

As a state, New York is failing these children. Today, we humbly ask you to raise the age at which children are automatically charged as adults. Currently, New York is one of two states where youth as young as 16 automatically end up in adult courts, jails and prisons.

Passing the raise the age proposal will enhance public safety and offer youth age-appropriate interventions (including, when necessary, incarceration).

In 2013, nearly 34,000 16- and 17-year olds were arrested and faced prosecution in the adult system – the vast majority for non-violent crimes. We should be better than that.

Adult prisons do not focus on rehabilitation, and are not designed to meet the needs of children. National studies show that young people confined in adult facilities are much more likely to face traumatic physical and sexual violence than those in juvenile facilities.

This lack of age-appropriate intervention and increased exposure to violence also leads to higher rates of recidivism and, as a result, higher costs for the justice system as a whole. 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.

From a public safety perspective, raising the age is about being both smart on crime and tough on crime – an approach that numerous law enforcement officials from around the state have endorsed. By creating a path to more positive outcomes for more children, raising the age would lead to crime reductions and help foster safer, more livable streets throughout the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We are ready to stand by you and move forward with this important policy change. It goes without saying that all New Yorkers will be better off under this approach.

Respectfully,

J. Bruce Baker, Pastor
All Souls Parish/Presbyterian Church,
Port Chester

Bob Berson
Ethical Culture Society of Northern
Westchester

Rabbi Jonathan Blake
Westchester Reform Temple, Scarsdale

Rabbi Jeff Brown
Scarsdale Synagogue

Rabbi Aaron Brusso
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Trinity Episcopal Church, Ossining

Rev. Doris K. Dalton
Memorial United Methodist Church of
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The Rev. Noelle Damico, Member
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Rev. Dr. Susan G. De George, Stated Clerk
Hudson River Presbytery

The Rev. Dr. Gawain de Leeuw, OA, Rector
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church,
White Plains

Rev Joyce Dugger, Protestant Chaplain
Hofstra University

Wayne Francis, Lead Pastor
Authentic Church, White Plains

Rev. Dr. Steven Meredith Garmon, Minister
Community Unitarian Universalist
Congregation, White Plains

The Rev. Jeffrey A. Geary, Pastor
White Plains Presbyterian Church

Rabbi David Greenberg
Temple Sharaay Tefila, Bedford

The Rev. Susan C. Harriss, Rector
Christ's (Episcopal) Church, Rye

The Reverend Sarah E. Henkel
White Plains Presbyterian Church

Rabbi Julie Hilton Danan, Rabbi
Pleasantville Community Synagogue

The Rev. Dr. David R. Holder, Founder and Senior Pastor

Ministers Gregory Adegbola, Dierdra Clark, Gregory Millings, Marlon Simpkins, Alex Smith, Sherin Swift, John Udochi
New York Covenant Church, New Rochelle

Rabbi Jonathan Jaffe
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Ethical Culture Society of Westchester

Rev. Dr. Robert E. Young, Sr. Pastor
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