

# ACLU of Wisconsin: Endorses Budget Proposal To Raise The Age For Adult Criminal Charges To 18

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MADISON – The ACLU of Wisconsin today commended Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers for including a plan in his state budget proposal to raise the age at which a person can be criminally charged as an adult to 18, a policy change that would keep children out of the adult corrections system.

The new age requirement means that Wisconsin would no longer be one of only two states that allows 17-year-olds to enter the adult system when charged with a crime. The ACLU has long advocated that criminal proceedings involving 17-year-olds be handled exclusively under the purview of the Department of Children and Families, where other juvenile cases are managed.

People under the age of 25 who are sentenced as adults have been found to have worse outcomes and are put in far greater danger than those processed in the juvenile system. According to the Equal Justice Initiative, a child is [five times more likely](#) to be sexually assaulted in prison than in a juvenile facility and [9 times more likely](#) to attempt suicide.

The [American Psychological Association](#) has reported that advancements in neuroscience have shown that brain development progresses into early adulthood, and that adolescents are neurologically more prone to act impulsively and exercise poor judgement.

“As a 17-year-old kid who was pushed into the adult system, I can say firsthand that forcing teens into an environment designed for adults is immoral, it does not enhance public safety, and imperils the safety and wellbeing of those sent there,” said Sean Wilson, Smart Justice Campaign Manager of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “A growing body of evidence has revealed that the brains of teenagers are not yet fully developed, making adolescents especially susceptible to poor decision-making and lapses in judgement, a fact that even the Supreme Court has recognized. While this doesn’t excuse young people taking part in criminal activity, it does speak to the fact that children and adults are different in fundamental ways, and that our criminal legal system should acknowledge those distinctions during the adjudication process. “

“By legally ensuring that 17-year-olds are not automatically tried as adults, Wisconsin can keep them out of the Department of Corrections, where they can at times be in grave danger, and keep them in the juvenile system which is better equipped to respond to their needs and help foster positive change.” We are glad that Gov. Evers has given our state an opportunity to finally do away with this barbaric and misguided practice,” Wilson said.

This press release is available online at:

<https://www.aclu-wi.org/en/news/aclu-wisconsin-endorses--budget-proposal-raise-age-adult-criminal-charges-18>