



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Richard H. Malone
President and CEO

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Dear Cook County Board:

The YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago strongly urges the Cook County Board's support for legislation to restore judicial discretion in the transfer of juveniles to adult court. House Bill 172, currently under consideration in the Illinois General Assembly provides an opportunity for judges to take into account the child's age, degree of participation in offense, and individual circumstances before determining if the crime should be transferred to adult court.

Childhood and adolescent exposure to violence is highly pronounced in Chicago; the shooting of public school students is a regular occurrence, the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center has over 5,000 admissions annually, and 16 percent of teens report attempting suicide—the highest rate in the country.

The Y's commitment to violence prevention grows out of our driving concern with helping young people live more stable, fulfilling lives. Based on growing bodies of research, we know that chronic exposure to traumatic stress places thousands of Chicagoland youth at risk of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disturbance and somatization. Left untreated, these symptoms can lead to engagement in maladaptive coping mechanisms and behaviors such as drug use, academic failure, self-harm, bullying, gang involvement, incarceration and early death.

Our approach to violence prevention is designed to reduce this cycle of harm, mobilizing what Dr. Bruce Perry calls the fundamental power of rhythm and relationships. We move towards this vision by working to reduce adverse childhood experiences, building community protective factors and strengthening human resiliency.

Your support of this legislation is significant because it gives a voice to youth who may have been silenced because of traumatic experiences throughout their childhood. It's time for us as a society to ask the important question: Did these children fail us, or did we fail them? Automatically moving a child as young as 13 years old to adult court without a judicial hearing is not only costly to the Cook County Board's bottom line, but it is a clear indication that these children do not matter in the eyes of the court and in our communities.

The Y's programs strive to support these youth in a way that helps them cope with adverse experiences and realize their true potential. Please join us in our efforts to support these young people and give them the voice they deserve.

Sincerely,

Richard Malone

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