



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DELAWARE**  
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## TESTIMONY FROM THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DELAWARE

March 2021

We support adoption of both HB 26 and HB27,  
juvenile reform bills that address the treatment and well-being of youth  
while under the custody and care of the Delaware Justice System.

House Bill 26 would end youth incarcerations in adult prisons, mandating that youth under the age of 18 who are adjudicated in the Superior Court be under the custody of the Department of Services for Children and Youth and their Families (DSCYF) until they reach the age of 18. House Bill 27 mandates that DSCYF have exclusive jurisdiction over a juvenile's care, custody, and control until 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday, even if found guilty and sentenced by Superior Court. (In some cases the age may be raised to 21.)

The LWVDE position is grounded in our Core Value of supporting policies and programs that promote the well-being, development, and safety of all children.

Our position of support is in line with recommendations from ACT 4 Juvenile Justice, the ACLU Pulitzer Center article *Children Are Different*, as well as *Children Tried as Adults Face Danger, Less Chance for Rehabilitation*, prepared by the Southern Poverty Law Center, October 30, 2015, and Delaware Research papers that include *Transfer of Juvenile Offenders to Adult Court in Delaware*, prepared by Timothy J. Brandon, Ph.D.

*The findings and positions that we underscore in our support of HB 26 and HB 27 are:*

- Youth are not safe in Adult Facilities - Adult Prison population pose a distinct and direct threat to the development, well-being, and successful rehabilitation of youth. Studies show that youth held in adult facilities are 36 times more likely to commit suicide and are at greatest risk for sexual victimization.
- Youth have not reached brain or social-emotional maturity. Youth offenders are often victims of neglect, poverty, and trauma. They require connection to family and community, along with education and multi-systemic therapy options to provide for growth and development that support setting healthy boundaries, problem solving and critical thinking skills, not appropriately provided for in an adult facility.

- Youth should not be pressed into a system intended for adults. Most youth in the adult system are non-violent. Furthermore, youth of color are over-represented in the ranks of juveniles being transferred to adult court. To force youth into an adult prison environment is cruel and it is shown to be detrimental to incarcerated youth rather than rehabilitative.
- Sentencing youth as adults costs more and does not reduce crime – Research shows that young people who are kept in the juvenile justice system are less likely to reoffend than young people who are transferred into the adult system.