



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## Advocates praise Independent Democratic Conference on passage of Raise the Age

JEFFREY D. KLEIN April 9, 2017

| ISSUE: **RAISE THE AGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM**

*Proposal was a priority for the IDC during this year's session*

**Albany, NY** — Criminal justice advocates praised the **Independent Democratic Conference** for championing Raise the Age throughout the budget process.

The progressive reform passed on Sunday.

The Raise the Age measure will ensure that the vast majority of 16- and 17-year-olds will wind up in the Family Court system, where they will receive rehabilitation services to put them on a path to a bright future.

Of 30,000 youths arrested each year, under the new Raise the Age measure in New York less than 1.5% of 16- and 17-year-olds will wind up with a case heard in a Youth Part. This creates a substantially more just and progressive system than other states like Wisconsin, Michigan and Texas.

In a major move, advocated for by the IDC, all teens will be removed from Rikers Island within a year. The city jail is where Kalief Browder, a young man from the Bronx, was incarcerated for three years after being wrongfully accused of stealing a backpack. Inside,

Browder attempted to commit suicide multiple times and tragically killed himself after his release.

“Kalief believed in justice although the justice system didn't believe in him; and He was going to make the system work. The belief and constant vigilance of the communities of advocates that rally-cried year after year to make Raise the Age a New York issue to be dealt with shows that you, Kalief Browder, had the prophecy to make the system work for you. This is a victory for sure in which we will NOT rest but until your prophecy is complete I shall not rest either. Thank you Governor Cuomo, Speaker Heastie, Senator Klein and state legislators for this victory,” **said Akeem Browder.**

“The passage of the raise the age bill is a landmark event for juvenile justice in our state. Senator Klein and the IDC deserve enormous credit for their exceptional leadership in this effort. It has been a privilege to work with them to gain passage of this critically important legislation. This is a great day for New York and for the future of our children who are our greatest resource,” **said Judge Jonathan Lippman, former Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals.**

“This is a major step forward for criminal justice reform in New York State. The adult criminal justice system is not developmentally appropriate for most teenagers – we can, and we must, do better. Having served on the Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice, I have long advocated for a common-sense update to our penal law. With this important reform, New York is now joining the rest of the country in instituting safer, smarter, and ultimately more successful interventions for teenagers. I thank Governor Cuomo, Speaker Heastie, Senator Klein and the legislature for reaching an agreement on this important issue,” **said Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.**

“The passage of the Raise The Age bill by both houses of the legislature represents a quantum leap forward in achieving a more humane and equitable juvenile justice system. The National Action Network has advocated and worked for several years on New York State's raising the age of criminal liability. Tens of thousands of children will now be given the opportunity to have their non violent offenses handled in family court. The legislative leadership worked courageously and diligently in achieving this criminal justice reform milestone. We want to thank Governor Cuomo, Speaker Heastie, IDC Leader Klein and all legislative leaders for working on this milestone reform,” **said Minister Kirsten John Foy, Northeast Regional Director, National Action Network.**

“The Center for Court Innovation knows first-hand the value of keeping young people out of the criminal justice system. For many years, we have worked to expand the use of alternatives for young people, allowing them to avoid the negative consequences of criminal convictions while connecting them to the resources they need to avoid future justice-system involvement. Evaluations have demonstrated that these programs maintain public safety while improving outcomes for participants. We applaud the New York State Assembly, Independent Democratic Conference, and State Legislature for raising the age of criminal responsibility, and we look forward to working collaboratively to improve outcomes for the young people of New York,” **said Greg Berman, Executive Director for the Center for Court Innovation.**

“I am excited to see the support Senator Alcantara and other supportive senators have shown for raising the age. Our young people are currently incarcerated as adults and treated as adults instead of being treated as young people who have made a mistake. I think it is magnificent that the Senate has raised the age of criminal responsibility, as it prevents young people from being locked up with hardened criminals who have a bad influence on them. By raising the age, the Senate has given hundreds of young people the opportunity to improve themselves and pay their debt to society without exposing themselves to abuse and

mistreatment from career criminals,” **said Iesha Sekou, CEO of Street Corner Resources.**

“The Children's Defense Fund - New York thanks the Independent Democratic Conference for recognizing and prioritizing the need to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York. This critical legislation ensures that thousands of youth in New York will finally be treated in an age appropriate manner by the justice system, giving them the second chance they need and deserve to change their life trajectories. We look forward to working with our elected officials to ensure that all youth who enter the justice system receive the treatment they need to succeed,” **said Naomi Post, Executive Director and Beth Powers, Director of Youth Justice, Children’s Defense Fund – New York.??**

“Families across the state are breathing a huge sigh of relief knowing that our children will now be treated like the minors that they are in the justice system. We know that they deserve the chance to develop and achieve their full potential. Now they will be given that chance. We are so grateful to the courageous families and youth who have shared their stories in order to shape change and make the system better for future families and young people. We thank Governor Cuomo, Senator Klein, Speaker Heastie and the state legislature for this important public policy change,” **said Paige Pierce, CEO , Families Together in NYS.**

“We commend Senator Klein and New York policymakers for taking this important step that will enhance public safety, strengthen families, and ensure more troubled young people get on the right track. We are confident the important step New York has taken to raise the age, following similar action in Louisiana and South Carolina last year, will help persuade the handful of remaining states from North Carolina to Texas to follow suit,” **said Marc Levin, Policy Director for Right on Crime.**

“Citizens’ Committee for Children is grateful to the members of the Independent Democratic Conference for their commitment to ensuring legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility was included in this year’s budget agreement. As a result, youth, families and

communities all just got safer, stronger and more humane. This historic change, which brings New York in line with 48 other states, is also thanks to the voices of impacted youth and families, faith leaders, advocates, providers, legal service organizations, Family Court Judges, and citizens who have spent many years urging New York to Raise the Age!" **said Jennifer March, Executive Director, and Stephanie Gendell, Associate Executive Director, Policy and Advocacy, for the Citizens Committee for Children.**

"The vast majority of youth arrests are for minor crimes (74 percent are misdemeanors) including not paying subway fare. Nearly 20,000 16 and 17-year olds are arrested for turnstile jumping every year. A child should not go to Rikers Island for jumping a turnstile. I applaud Senator Hamilton, the State Legislature and his IDC colleagues for having compassion for our children," **said Bertha Lewis, The Black Institute.**

"New York has shown what happens when lawmakers look past partisan differences and work together. They are able to pass smart justice reforms that will have a positive impact on public safety. By raising the age of criminal responsibility, New York joins 48 other states in recognizing juveniles must be treated differently than adults. This smart on crime reform will provide 16- and 17-year-olds with the appropriate treatment and rehabilitation, instead of incarceration, to prevent future offenses. This legislation will reduce crime and keep our communities safe. We thank Senator Jeff Klein for his leadership and commitment to making this reform a reality. Working with Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Coalition Leader Jeff Klein has achieved a historic accomplishment," **said Holly Harris, Executive Director, U.S. Justice Action Network.**

"Over the past decade, research on adolescent brain development and on recidivism have confirmed the moral truth that kids should be treated like kids," **said Laurie Parise, Executive Director of Youth Represent.** "Youth Represent commends Senators Klein, Hamilton, Savino and the Independent Democratic Caucus for their leadership in this critical step towards

protecting 16 and 17 year olds from some of the most devastating effects of adult prosecution and incarceration. Thanks to this legislation, more kids will be treated like kids, and fewer will face eviction, deportation, and the lifetime stigma of a criminal record. And for the first time, thousands of New Yorkers will have the opportunity to seal criminal records and move on with their lives. We are proud to be part of the movement for comprehensive juvenile justice reform, and we congratulate the young people and their families who have been at the forefront of the Raise the Age campaign. We also look forward to continuing to work with the governor and the legislature to expand life-changing protections to more young New Yorkers.”

“The Fortune Society applauds passage of Raise the Age and celebrates the positive impact that this policy change will have on the lives of young people who have gotten tangled in the criminal justice system. In our 50 years of providing alternatives to incarceration and of helping those released from incarceration to build positive lives in the community, the Fortune Society has been saddened by the damage done by treating young people as though they were adults. Both brain science and practical experience teach us that there is a profound difference between the decision-making of adolescents and of adults. Treating young people as juveniles, including utilizing juvenile facilities instead of Rikers island when incarceration is needed, accords with best practices and offers these young people a better chance at rebuilding their lives and avoiding further contact with the criminal justice system. We commend Governor Cuomo, legislative leaders and members for making this long needed reform, **said JoAnne Page, President and CEO of the Fortune Society.**

“From lack of access to higher education and job opportunities, to managing trauma from these experiences in violent environments, and in many cases, recidivism, these policies have served to punish youth for life. OBT has seen this first hand through many of the individuals we serve. This change in policy through raising the age of criminal responsibility coupled with the recognition that the process must also be different for youth via family or

youth-specific avenues, is a critical step towards meeting our responsibility to open doors of opportunity, not shut them,” said **Liliana Polo-McKenna, Interim Chief Executive Officer for Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow.**