



When North Carolina enacted Raise the Age in 2019, we were the last state in the nation to protect kids from adult court. Now, our Legislature is rolling back that significant progress and, in doing so, ignoring the plethora of evidence about the ways in which children are less mature and have significantly better outcomes when they remain in the juvenile system.

In the four and a half years since North Carolina stopped automatically prosecuting 16- and 17-year-olds in adult court, tens of thousands of kids have been kept out of the adult system and received rehabilitative, age-appropriate, services instead of incarceration in the adult system. When children receive services from the juvenile system, they are far less likely to reoffend than children who go through the adult system.

Now, under the guise that House Bill 834 is simply a “tweak” of Raise the Age, our Legislature seeks a major change to the law that would in effect be a rollback of the tremendous progress made. House Bill 834 would force 16- and 17-year-olds accused of A-E felonies to start out in adult court. The entire purpose of Raise the Age was to ensure child offenders started out in juvenile court because juvenile judges have greater discretion to order wraparound services like mental health care, family support aid, or job-training programs. Furthermore, while juvenile court is confidential, adult court is not. Forcing these children to start out in adult court allows their court records and mugshots to be publicly released, meaning these cases will follow these children for the rest of their lives. Raise the Age specifically sought to prevent this so that these children could go on and build a life and future without the stigma of the mistakes made in their youth.

Keeping these cases in juvenile court reduces the child’s likelihood of recidivism, which benefits all of us. In comparison, studies make clear that children going through adult court are at a greater risk of suicide, assault, and recidivism.

Vetoing House Bill 834 is not only what is morally just but is what is required of you as North Carolina’s Governor to protect the children of North Carolina and our State as a whole.

Emancipate NC strongly condemns these blatant attempts to roll back the tremendously successful progress of Raise the Age and vehemently urges our Governor to veto this bill and protect the future of children in North Carolina.

Respectfully,

Dawn Blagrove, Executive Director
Emancipate NC