



John Howard Association of Illinois

300 West Adams Street, Suite 423 Chicago, IL 60606
Tel. 312-782-1901 Fax. 312-782-1902 www.john-howard.org

HB 1695: Juvenile Lifer Assessment and Review

Why you should support HB 1695

- Presently, approximately 102 men and one woman are serving natural life sentences in Illinois for crimes committed when they were younger than 18 years old. All were convicted of first degree murder.
- These prisoners include those who were convicted based on accountability theory (not prime actors), who were otherwise minimally involved in the crime, lacked intent to kill, were as young as 14 years old or were emotionally and mentally immature, or all of these. For many of these prisoners, the judge had no discretion to sentence them to other than life without parole.
- This group of prisoners also includes those who were principal actors, showed an intent to do harm, and sometimes were sentenced to life at the judge's discretion.
- This bill puts a mechanism in place to distinguish those offenders who were immature, marginally involved or less culpable, and over decades, fully rehabilitated, from those who were mature, culpable or not rehabilitated.
- No juvenile lifer may apply for assessment until he or she has served 20 years in prison.
- This bill is written to spare victims or survivors one common victims' concern, of appearing regularly before parole boards. In a two-stage process, the initial determination of parole eligibility is made by a panel of the Prisoner Review Board (PRB). Unless the panel concludes that the prisoner is a realistic candidate for parole consideration, the prisoner will not receive a parole hearing, which will mean that victims or survivors will not appear before the PRB. Victims' and survivors' input into the parole process will also assure fairness.
- The Illinois General Assembly, recognizing that juveniles are less culpable and have a greater rehabilitative potential, long prohibited the execution of youth under 18. This bill addresses an inconsistency in Illinois that allows some youth, as young as 14, to be sentenced to life imprisonment without any possibility for review of their sentences.
- This bill simply allows a review of a life sentence imposed on a child. Children act as children, even when the consequences are dire. They have the greatest potential for rehabilitation. It is now well-settled that the brains of adolescents are not fully developed, and they therefore cannot appreciate the decisions they make in the same way adults can.
- The two-stage process required by this bill and the strict standards of the PRB insure that only those inmates who are worthy and not a threat to public safety will be released.

HB 1695 is supported by (in formation):

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