

Judiciary Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1542

AN ACT RAISING THE AGE OF ARREST OF A CHILD AND THE USE OF

Title: HANDCUFFS ON YOUNG CHILDREN.

Vote Date: 4/10/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/26/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

CO-SPONSORS:

Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.

Rep. Maryam Khan, 5th Dist.

Rep. Kadeem Roberts, 137th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to raise the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction from ten to twelve years, effective July 1, 2026. Furthermore, the age will be automatically raised from twelve to fourteen years effective July 1, 2028. The age of 14 is the international standard as set by the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, and it recognizes the lack of cognitive maturity children maintain compared to their adult counterparts. Children diverted from the court jurisdiction will be serviced through, including but not limited to the community-based diversion system, the DCF's Children's Behavioral Health Services System, youth review boards and juvenile service bureaus. This legislation also aims to rest restrict the use of handcuffs on children under fourteen years of age.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language strikes the first and second sections of the original bill, leaving only the handcuff section. It also makes technical changes to 1(a) and adds a provision to 1(b) allowing for the handcuffing of a child "because the child is using or threatening to use physical force on a police officer."

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Judicial Branch, External Affairs Division: The External Affairs division of the Judicial Branch submitted testimony expressing concern over some of the language in section 2 that does not specify whether the age is based on the time of the alleged offense or the arrest.

Renee Cimino, Director of Delinquency Defense and Child Protection, Office of Chief Public Defender: Renee Cimino submitted testimony in opposition of sections 1 and 2 because, as drafted, it eliminates the state's current minimum age of arrest for all criminal offenses. They are concerned by the lack of a minimum age for police referrals, and ultimately it would lead to counterproductive backsliding on existing, effective juvenile reform.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Christina Ghio Esq., Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate: Christina Ghio submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it ensures children who cannot be arrested due to their age be referred for more appropriate juvenile services. The focus of these programs is to work with a child to rehabilitate, not punish.

DeVaughn Ward Esq., Interim Correction Ombudsman: DeVaughn Ward submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it represents an important and humane step forward in the ongoing efforts to build a justice system rooted in dignity, developmentally appropriate responses, and long-term public wellbeing.

Melissa Goemann Esq., Sr. Policy Counsel, National Youth Justice Network: Melissa Goemann submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recommends these provisions. Children are fundamentally different than adults; they lack impulse control, are highly susceptible to pressures, and cannot quite fully comprehend the consequences of their actions.

Agata Lawska Esq., Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Connecticut Legal Services, New Haven Legal Assistance Association Inc.: Agata Lawska submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will bring the state in line with United Nations recommendations that the age of criminal responsibility be no lower than 14.

Jason Szanyi Esq.: Jason Szanyi submitted testimony in support of this legislation because these efforts have applied well-established research to Connecticut's youth using real time data from the state. Arresting a young person for misbehavior significantly increases their odds for subsequent arrests and additional justice system involvement, leading to a lifetime in the system essentially due to bad behavior in youth.

Amber Kelly, PhD, MSW, LCSW, Professor, Quinnipiac University: Amber Kelly submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it reflects evidence-based, trauma-informed, and fiscally responsible policy. Bypassing the judicial system will connect children with more helpful services and will spare them the lifelong consequences involved with early justice involvement.

Ella Suh, MPH Candidate, Yale School of Public Health, Emily Knox, Ph.D., Research and Policy Director, CT Voices for Children: Dr. Knox and Ella Suh submitted testimony in support of this legislation because they represent a necessary and evidence-based shift in

how Connecticut responds to children in crisis, one that centers on both child development and public safety.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU CT: Jess Zaccagnino submitted testimony in support of this legislation because children who are arrested are much more likely to be rearrested, and involving children in the criminal legal system does not prevent or deter crime. This bill is essential for children of color to break the criminal justice system cycle throughout their lives.

Abraham Santiago, Smart Justice Leader, ACLU CT: Abraham Santiago submitted testimony in support of this legislation because currently, the system harms youth. He believes the state must align itself with UN recommendations on raising the arrest age to 14 to better protect youth offenders, disproportionately kids of color.

Mary Ann Scali, Executive Director, The Gault Center: Mary Ann Scali submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is an important step in providing Connecticut youth with developmentally appropriate alternatives to the juvenile legal system and bringing the state closer to internally recognized research on the minimum age of responsibility.

Nieka Thompson, Zoe Masters, Center for Childrens' Advocacy: Nieka Thompson and Zoe Masters submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is necessary reform that aligns state policy with research on child development, racial justice, and effective public safety strategies.

Teresa Kominos, Policy Counsel, Human Rights for Kids: Teresa Kominos submitted testimony in support of this legislation because raising the minimum age of prosecution is sound policy that is rooted in research which has shown that diversion of young children away from court when appropriate and providing them with proper treatment and trauma-informed services benefits children, their families, and their communities.

Marc Donald, President and CEO, Catalyst CT: Marc Donald submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is a significant step forward in ensuring that the juvenile justice system prioritizes rehabilitation, understanding, and the wellbeing of children. They believe in taking an approach that focuses on healing and age-appropriate responses rather than punishment.

Shelby Henderson, Tow Youth Justice Institute: Shelby Henderson submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is a step towards treating children as children and ensuring policy is consistent with well documented research on child development, racial justice, and effective public health and safety strategies that protect youths.

Erica Bromley, Youth Justice Consultant, CT Youth Services Association: Erica Bromley submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it raises the minimum age of juvenile jurisdiction to a year developmentally appropriate. Keeping children out of the system is the right thing to do, however this must be done through meaningful investment in our youth.

Christina Quaranta, Executive Director, Connecticut Justice Alliance: Christina Quaranta submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will lower the number of youths detained by the state, it will increase public safety and the number of children that

have a primary chance at the opportunity for diversionary services, and it will lower the trauma and stigma that young children will have to carry.

Andrew Feinstein, Legislative Chair, Special Education Equity for Kids: Andrew Feinstein submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the use of handcuffs on children is dehumanizing, developmentally counterproductive, and genuinely not in anyone's best interest.

TJ Nuccio, Children's Policy Analyst, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity: TJ Nuccio submitted testimony in support of this legislation because adolescence is a time of increased emotional reactivity and during this period social interactions may influence the rise of emotional activity and increase risky choices and behavior due to lack of prefrontal cortex development.

Barbara Fair, Director, Stop Solitary CT: Barbara Fair submitted testimony in support of this legislation because failure to support this state's children and utilize restorative justice policy will only lead to the neglect of children. She believes that this state must recognize that children are not adults, and this bill is a step towards that.

Jocelyn Pineda, Program Associate, EMERGE Connecticut, Inc.: Jocelyn Pineda submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it will force the state to look at alternatives to arrest and implement data-driven programs and intervention techniques that can support the wellbeing of children.

Doris Maldonado Mendez, Guardian Ad Litem, Children in Placement: Doris Maldonado Mendez submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it represents a compassionate, effective, and equitable approach to juvenile justice. They believe this state must consider the impact of youth trauma, developmentally appropriate interventions, comprehensive services, youth mentoring, and community-based alternatives.

Mendi Paca, Fairfield County's Community Foundation: Mendi Paca submitted testimony in support of this legislation because raising the minimum arrest age to bring the state in line with UN recommendations will save time and money while children would have access to better support and services. They believe this will help treat our children as a priority, not a liability.

Christina Capitan, CT CannaWarriors: Christina Capitan submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it acknowledges children as such in the eyes of the law. A disturbing number of children of color are forced to grow up too fast, which leads to numerous issues down the road.

Cindy Prizio, President, One Standard of Justice: Cindy Prizio submitted testimony in support of this legislation because age at the time of offense should dictate the way the law is enforced.

CT Justice Alliance: 24 members of the Connecticut Justice Alliance submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it improves community safety and ensures the state is responding to adolescent behaviors with appropriate responses and interventions rooted in care versus punishment.

Tanya Rhodes-Small: Tanya Rhodes-Small submitted testimony in support of this legislation because as a school counselor, she has seen firsthand the profound impact that early encounters with the criminal justice system have on a child and the devastating trauma it can lead to, which brings further problems.

Judah Lopez: Judah Lopez submitted testimony in support of this legislation because arresting children can cause or exacerbate trauma-related conditions that can lead to further challenges for these children in healthy development.

Alexandra Dziura: Alexandra Dziura submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is imperative that this state take steps towards ending the school-to-prison pipeline that many youths in urban areas become a part of.

Andrew Zhebrak: Andrew Zhebrak submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it would properly account for developments in contemporary psychological and sociological research, in addition to conforming to widely accepted international standards.

Alex Brown: Alex Brown submitted testimony in support of this legislation because the state must prioritize community-based interventions that address the root cause of criminalized behavior. Programs like youth services and juvenile review boards offer meaningful support while keeping kids connected with their families.

Amber Faucette: Amber Faucette submitted testimony in support of this legislation because it is an important step toward protecting children and ensuring they are treated with the care and understanding they need.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

CT Police Chiefs Association: The Connecticut Police Chiefs' association submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation because law enforcement already utilizes alternative resources available to correct bad behaviors of juveniles that lead to criminal offenses. This bill as written does not account for victim impact and creates greater victimization.

Tenaya Taylor, Nonprofit Accountability Group: Tenaya Taylor submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation because the state must focus on counseling, education, training programs, and resources towards young people that keep them away from lives of crime.

Reported by: Griffin Olshan

Date: 4/24/25