

1212 New York Ave. NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005
202.525.5717



Free Markets. Real Solutions.
www.rstreet.org

My name is Nila Bala, and I am the Associate Director of Criminal Justice Policy at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including juvenile justice reform, and that's why SB 279 is of special interest to us.

SB 279 would automatically waive juvenile court jurisdiction over children 12 years and older who have been accused of attempted murder or murder. This means these children, as young as 12, would be in the adult prison system. The research on this issue is clear—children in the in the adult system are vulnerable to abuse and do not receive age-appropriate services. Additionally, placing children in the adult system harms society.

The R Street Institute believes that young people must be separated from the adult criminal justice system in order to preserve their physical and mental health and foster future economic success. Children in the juvenile system have greater access to crucial educational and technical training. This leads to better opportunities upon release and an increased chance to grow into responsible, productive adults.

In contrast, studies have found that young people transferred to the adult criminal justice system are 34 percent more likely to be rearrested for crimes than youth retained in the juvenile justice system. Ultimately, retaining youth in the juvenile system will save taxpayers money, since they will be less likely to reoffend, and will be able to more easily gain employment and contribute to their economy.

While there may be exceptional cases where youths under 18 should be tried as adults, placing children into the adult system automatically is bad policy. This bill makes it automatic, instead of allowing for discretion. Additionally, it takes parents out of the equation—when children are placed in the adult system, parents lose the ability to be involved in the disposition.

With each passing day, young people are forced into an adult justice system that does not address their needs and, in fact, exposes them to significant physical harm and psychological trauma. For their well-being, for the safety and protection of our communities, we oppose SB 279.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nila Bala

Associate Director for Criminal Justice Policy
R Street Institute
nbala@rstreet.org