

May 5th, 2009

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The Honorable Mark S. Meadows
Committee Chair
House Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Meadows,

We are writing to express our support for House Bill 4518, 4594, 4595 and 4596. Elimination of life without parole sentencing is an important step in improving the current criminal justice system in Michigan. Under the existing penal code, a judge's discretion is limited when sentencing juvenile offenders, and, as numerous cases demonstrate, the potential for disproportionate sentencing is dangerously high. Additionally, juvenile life without parole sentencing is in violation of various human rights covenants, including the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Covenant for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Juvenile life without parole sentencing disregards the fact that juveniles do not possess the same mental capacity that adults do, and, in effect, prevents youth offenders from having the opportunity to positively contribute to society.

House Bill 4518, 4594, 4595 and 4596 will remedy these egregious violations of the rights of juveniles in the state of Michigan and allow the justice system to more justly sentence youth offenders. We urge the full support of this important measure.

Sincerely,

The Kalamazoo College Student Chapter of the ACLU