

SECOND LOOK FOR JUSTICE, SAFETY & SAVINGS

PROVIDE A PATH TO REDEMPTION FOR
REHABILITATED YOUTH SERVING EXTREME
SENTENCES IN ADULT PRISONS

THE PROBLEM: TEXAS IS A HARSH OUTLIER ON YOUTH SENTENCING

In Texas, children as young as 14 who are convicted of certain serious crimes can be sentenced to a **de facto life sentence**—with no opportunity for parole until they have served, in many cases, **at least 40 years behind bars**. Texas' parole system provides no viable mechanism for reviewing a case after a young person has rehabilitated and matured.

SOLUTION: PROVIDE A SECOND LOOK

Texas law should allow for parole eligibility at no more than **20 years** for a person whose offense was committed when they were younger than 18, and the parole board should be required to consider a specialized set of factors when determining whether to grant parole to such persons (e.g., growth, maturity, rehabilitation, and youthfulness at the time of the offense).

Importantly, "Second Look" legislation would **not mandate the release of a single incarcerated person**. It would simply provide an opportunity for parole consideration for people sentenced as youth to extreme terms who have rehabilitated and matured.

WHY SHOULD TEXAS GIVE CHILDREN A SECOND LOOK?

For Justice

- Youth are immature and have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility; they are more vulnerable and susceptible to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer pressure; and their character is still developing, meaning risky or antisocial behaviors are fleeting.
- Many youth serving extreme sentences were sentenced under the "law of parties"—with some serving life sentences for capital murder—despite having never physically harmed anyone.
- Extreme sentencing for youth disproportionately impacts youth of color, particularly Black youth, and several studies show that youth treated most punitively have been raised in poor neighborhoods, have limited education, have mental disabilities, and have been victims of physical and sexual abuse.

For Public Safety

- The part of the youth brain that controls risk and reward is still developing until a person's mid-to-late 20s, after which individuals begin to age out of crime, and a sharp drop-off in criminal behavior occurs.
- Research shows that "people previously convicted of a violent offense are less likely to return to prison for any reason, and they are very unlikely to return for another serious crime."
- States across the country have safely reduced extreme sentences for youth and, in addition to having extremely low recidivism rates, many former lifers are in college, working as advocates, starting businesses, and engaged in community payback projects.

For Cost Savings

- In Texas, it costs approximately \$2.5 million to incarcerate a youth for life — an enormous expense considering that most young people are likely rehabilitated long before their 40-year parole eligibility date. Comparatively, it costs taxpayers approximately \$625,720 to incarcerate a person for 20 years. Early release for those demonstrating sufficient rehabilitation and maturity could save Texas taxpayers approximately \$1,874,280 per person.
- If Second Look becomes law, Texas could save between **\$3.9 and \$12 million** in the first two years.

TEXAS IS READY FOR SECOND LOOK. Keeping children locked up for lengthy prison terms is a counterproductive use of limited tax dollars. Lawmakers can no longer afford to unnecessarily incarcerate people decades beyond what is reasonably defensible. Providing a meaningful opportunity for release for those who can demonstrate that they have sufficiently matured and rehabilitated recognizes the capacity of youth to change and will save millions of dollars.

Second Look legislation has also bipartisan support in Texas. According to a 2018 poll by the Texas Smart-On-Crime Coalition, which surveyed more than 600 Republican primary voters, 75% support Second Look.

