

# Protect the pardoned; release stigma of past

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There's a reason the Supreme Court prohibited execution of juveniles and sentences of life without parole. There's a reason New York state just legislated that 16- and 17-year-olds should be dealt with as juveniles and not as adults.

The reason is that the best available science demonstrates that risk-taking behaviors, impulsivity and sensation-seeking are hallmarks of the adolescent brain, but that most people outgrow it.

The notion that teenagers make mistakes is at the heart of New York's Raise the Age reform, and, before that, Youthful Offender legislation. The Court of Appeals said the purpose is to avoid "stigmatiz(ing) youths ... with criminal records triggered by hasty or thoughtless acts which, although crimes, may not have been the serious deeds of hardened criminals."

Thirty-nine people have just received pardons from Gov. Andrew Cuomo for misdemeanors or nonviolent felonies committed when they were 16 or 17 years old. They have all lived crime-free for 10 years or more.

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Calling their punishment illegal, several of Maryland's so-called "juvenile lifers" have petitioned the state Court of Appeals seeking changes to their life sentences. The judges of Maryland's highest court are considering several cases involving what are known as "juvenile lifers," people charged with murder and other serious crimes while under the age of 18. They are challenging their life prison sentences.

Media: WBAL

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Naming pardon recipients would defeat the entire purpose of the pardon: to allow law-abiding adults to move on from mistakes when they were teenagers. Eighty-seven percent of all employers perform some type of background check, and everyone knows how to Google. Rehabilitation requires removing the real barriers that a criminal record creates for higher education, employment, travel and countless other opportunities.

As an organization on the front lines, the Center for Community Alternatives supports the governor in protecting the names of pardon recipients. Anyone who ever made a mistake as a teenager should, too.

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