



March 16, 2023

Chair Kelly Moller
Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Letter of Support for House File 1300

Chair Moller and Members of the House Public Safety Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN), the coalition to end relationship abuse, is writing in support of H.F. 1300 – a bill that would eliminate the sentence of life in prison without the possibility of release for youth under the age of 18. Violence Free Minnesota is a statewide coalition of over 80 member programs that provide advocacy and services to victim/survivors of domestic and sexual violence across the state.

Research shows us that brain development does not fully mature until the mid-to-late 20s, yet, we continue to give life sentences to youth as young as 14-years-old. Unfortunately, we also know that this practice is affecting children of color in disproportionate ways. The school-to-prison pipeline, the practice of pushing youth out of our education systems and into prison cells, only expands social disparities and contributes to counterproductive outcomes like reincarceration, and oftentimes, convictions as adults including life without parole.

Nationwide, and across our state, criminal legal systems are incarcerating youth at alarming rates. This carceral practice of juveniles – both inhumane and unpractical – offers no remedies in the plight of restoring the lives and experiences of youth. Incarcerated children are still children, and the developmental realities of youth should eliminate the practice of sentencing youth to life without the possibility of release. We believe that age, individual circumstances, level of culpability, and possibility for rehabilitation should all be key considerations when determining sentencing of juveniles, and HF 1300 would make this possible in statute.

H.F. 1300 recognizes the problematic practice of sentencing youth to life without parole and provides youth with the opportunity to be rehabilitated, and ultimately become productive and contributing members of our society. It creates a pathway to discovering and addressing the needs of incarcerated youth in our state. We urge you to vote yes on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Lopez
Executive Director
Violence Free Minnesota

Shenika Chambers
Policy Program Manager
Violence Free Minnesota