

## POSITION STATEMENT: Raise the Age in North Carolina

### Prosecute All Youth Under Age 18 as Minors

North Carolina is one of only two states that continues to prosecute all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system, with no exceptions. Evidence shows that youth who go through the adult criminal system are more likely to recidivate and experience victimization. There are additional disparate outcomes determined on race: a study by University of Pittsburg finds that “black youth are three times as likely as white youth to be detained, controlling for other demographic and legal factors, including offense type and severity.”<sup>i</sup> Handling youth who commit crimes in the juvenile system improves public safety and eliminates unnecessary roadblocks to life success in the path of youth who are rehabilitated. **The National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter believes that all youth age 18 and younger should be prosecuted as minors.** According to the *NASW Code of Ethics*, Section 6.01 on Social Welfare, “Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.”

#### What Does Raise the Age Mean?

- “Raise the Age” will increase the age at which youth are tried as adults from 16 years to 18 years of age.
- Allows youth to be tried in the juvenile justice system, a more appropriate setting and allows them access to rehabilitative services to prevent them from ending up in the adult court system later in life.
- Ensures that youth are detained in juvenile facilities when needed instead of putting them at risk for violence in an adult detention facility.

#### Benefits of Raise the Age:

- Recidivism rates among 16- and 17-year olds in the adult criminal justice system are more than twice as high as those served by the juvenile justice system.
- Youth in the adult system are also more likely to re-offend in more serious and violent ways.
- By reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for youth, raise the age strengthens North Carolina’s tax base and reduces future expenses.
  - The Vera Institute in a 2011 report estimated that Raising the Age will generate \$52.3 million in net benefits per cohort of youth aged 16 and 17.
  - Many states found that the costs incurred were less than anticipated; Connecticut spent nearly \$12 million less than had been budgeted.
- Allows 16- and 17-year-olds into juvenile facilities with increased access and resources to obtain their high school diploma and pursue a college degree.
- Adults with criminal records are significantly more likely to be unemployed than those without records.
  - In this economy, we need to ensure that adolescent mistakes do not become permanent educational and workforce barriers.

<sup>i</sup> Shook, J. J., & Goodkind, S. A. (2009). Racial disproportionality in juvenile justice: The interaction of race and geography in pretrial detention for violent and serious offenses. *Race And Social Problems*, 1(4), 257-266. doi:10.1007/s12552-009-9021