

June 5, 2017

**Roca Testimony in Support of Legislation Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction to 21
(Bills H.3037, H.3078, S816, and S947)**

Joint Committee on the Judiciary

June 5, 2017

Dear Chairwoman Cronin, Chairman Brownsberger, and members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary,

Roca is respectfully submitting this testimony in support of legislation raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 18, 19 and 20 year olds in H.3037, H.3078, S816 and portions of S.947.

Young people, especially those who are involved in the criminal justice system, have been Roca's focus and expertise since 1988. Over the past year alone, we have served over 700 high-risk young men ages 17-24, who are all involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

Roca operates in 21 communities across Massachusetts, with sites in Boston, Springfield, Chelsea, and Lynn. We are privileged to partner with the Commonwealth on a range of initiatives, including the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) and the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Pay for Success Project, the largest of its kind in the country.

Exploring the best ways to help young people reduce their engagement in crime and make better future for themselves is the purpose of our work. While the recidivism rate in Massachusetts for 18-24 year olds is 76%, less than 10% of Roca graduates are rearrested. We continue to work closely with our partners in law enforcement and the criminal justice system to prove that change is possible, even for this group of high-risk young people.

Change is possible for our justice system, too.

We strongly believe that the most critical change for the young people in our justice system and the safety of our communities would be raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 21.

We firmly believe that raising the age is a unique opportunity to make a meaningful change – a change that would have a strong impact statewide and a particularly strong impact on the Commonwealth's young men of color.

These beliefs are not just make beliefs. They are grounded in (1) careful study of national and international policies pertaining to young adults in the justice system, (2) honest and deep discussions with our partners in the Massachusetts justice system, and (3) our daily work with hundreds of young people across the Commonwealth.

We would like to share with you briefly the work that led to our conclusion that raising the age to 21 is an appropriate change to our laws.

Over the past several years, we have played an active role in the national discussion on improving justice system outcomes for young adults ages 18-24. We have studied the current outcomes with this age group (which are disappointing not only in Massachusetts, but nationally); the most up to date scientific evidence in psychology, sociology, and brain science; and the most innovative policies anywhere from Connecticut to Illinois, California, New York, Germany, the U.K., and other jurisdictions.

We then convened a group of leaders in the Massachusetts justice system to focus on their own experience with this group of young people. Together with our partners in the trial court, the juvenile court, probation, several sheriff departments, several DA's offices, DYS and other experts, we looked at the data, and have discussed openly for over a year the various options for better outcome for young adults in our system.

And of course, we went back to our young people, and have learned once and again how unproductive their engagement in the criminal justice system has been, and how the lack of individualized approach resulted in poor outcomes for them, their families, and their communities.

This continued work led us to the conclusion that gradually raising the age of the juvenile court to 21 will improve both individual outcomes and public safety in Massachusetts.

As always, we invite you to explore together with us how we can all work to create a meaningful change for our young people and our communities.

Even when change seems hard, it is Roca's job to work closely with our young people and our partners and seek better outcomes for them. And even when change seems hard, it is the job of our legislators to consider meaningful and courageous changes to our laws.

Raising the age to 21 would be courageous, meaningful, and effective. Now is the time.

Respectfully,



Molly Baldwin
CEO & founder, Roca



Yotam Zeira
Director of External Affairs, Roca