

DPSFV.com

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

June 14, 2021

RE: DPSFV Supports H.R. 2908 by Congresswoman Karen Bass (D- CA)

Representatives of the Honorable San Fernando Valley Delegation:

On behalf of the Democratic Party of the San Fernando Valley (DPSFV), we are pleased to report that our Executive Board voted to support H.R. 2908 which establishes a minimum age of 12 for criminal culpability for children; increases the minimum age for a child to be tried as an adult from 13 to 16; eliminates the felony murder rule for children; prohibits the placement of children in adult jails or prisons; requires data collection on youth who come into the federal criminal justice system; and establishes a grant block program for treatment and services for children under 12 and child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. We urge you to support H.R. 2908.

DPSFV was founded in 1978 and is chartered by the Los Angeles County Democratic Central Committee. Our organization is the coordinating body for a coalition of twenty-one Democratic Clubs located in the six Assembly Districts (38, 39, 43, 45, 46, and 50) which are wholly or partially in the San Fernando Valley.

The DPSFV Political Action Committee met last month to discuss H.R. 2908 and voted to recommend that the DPSFV E-Board support this vital piece of legislation. The committee noted that in 2018, Governor Newsom signed multiple bills aimed at reforming our juvenile justice system. Senate Bill 1391 (Lara) prohibited the prosecution of 14- and 15-year-olds as adults, Senate Bill 439 (Mitchell) ended the criminal prosecution of very young children by making 12 years old the minimum age for most prosecution in juvenile court, and Senate Bill 1437 (Skinner) changed who can be charged under the felony murder rule and applied this protection retroactively. DPSFV supported these reforms in 2018 and we continue to support these reforms today.

Too often the criminal justice system fails to respond to children in a trauma-informed and age-appropriate ways. The vast majority of children involved in the criminal justice system are contending with early childhood trauma and unmitigated Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including psychological, physical, and/or sexual abuse; witnessing domestic violence; living with family members who are substance abusers, suffer from mental illness or suicidal ideation, or are incarcerated. Studies have shown that approximately 90 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have experienced at least two ACEs, and 27 percent of boys and 45 percent of girls have experienced at least five ACEs. For children sentenced to life in prison, nearly 80 percent of them reported witnessing violence in their homes, 50 percent were physically abused, and 20 percent were sexually abused during their life. However, the justice system rarely recognizes or understands the connection between children who have committed a criminal act and their previous exposure to trauma.

The lack of regard for child status and the failure to account for the impact of early childhood trauma in children transferred into the adult criminal justice system violates children's human rights and perpetuates systemic inequities – especially for Black, Hispanic, and Native American youth and youth from low socio-economic backgrounds who make up the vast majority of children harmed by the justice system. Black children comprise 58 percent of all children confined in adult prisons. Roughly 83 percent of children prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system are racial minorities, where black children represent 87 percent of drug cases, 48 percent of property cases, and 63 percent of public order offense cases.

We urge you to support H.R. 2908.

Please note that DPSFV will be tracking this bill as it travels through the Legislature. Your voting record will be noted and may be considered should you ever seek our endorsement. Your office is always welcome to contact DPSFV if you have any questions.

Sincerely and respectfully,



Chair Sean M. Rivas
Democratic Party of the San Fernando Valley

cc: Congressional Members Sherman, Cárdenas, Lieu, Schiff, and Bass (author)
U.S. Senators Feinstein and Padilla

PO Box 57259, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413 818-995-DEMS (3367)