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Children's Rights

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US: Life Without Parole Sentences for Children in Colorado

Across Colorado, residents are beginning to question whether children who commit a crime before the age of eighteen should ever be sentenced to life without parole. Historically, this harshest of prison sentences was restricted to adults. But as the Colorado legislature expanded adult prosecution of child offenders, it also expanded the possibility that life without parole would be imposed on children. At least forty-six such youth offenders are currently incarcerated in Colorado prisons with life without parole sentences.

Youth who break the law should be held accountable. Imprisonment may be a just punishment for those who commit serious violent crimes. But a sentence of life without parole for child offenders is cruel, unfair, and unnecessary. It violates common sense and universally recognized human rights principles. Moreover, while we recognize the importance of efforts to protect community safety, achieving that goal does not necessitate ignoring the potential of children to mature and to reclaim their lives. Change in Colorados laws to prevent the imposition of life without parole on youth offenders is long overdue.

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