

**Testimony in support of LD 986  
to the Committee on Judiciary**

March 31, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 1113, An Act Regarding Fairness in Sentencing for Persons Under 26 Years of Age.

Scientific study of brain formation by age and by impacts of childhood trauma have redefined emerging adulthood into our late twenties. This understanding should compel us to redefine youth sentencing. From a [June 2023 SentencingProject report](#), “Multidisciplinary research on the course of development from childhood into adulthood converges on the conclusion that this developmental course does not reach its apex at 18, but instead continues until one’s mid-20s, at a minimum. Yet the criminal legal system views people under 26 as if they were fully developed adults. The treatment of young adults as if they are fully matured adults is especially cruel for those facing sentences that allow no possibility for release”.

Youth sentencing is being studied and reformed in many states as well as the national level. As with adult incarceration, there is a serious racial disparity with youth incarceration, as we have in Maine. [A January 2025 article from the National Council of State Legislatures](#) notes “The field of emerging adult justice aims to account for the fact that young people up to 25 and sometimes older still exhibit the risky, impulsive behavior of adolescents. In fact, young adults 18 to 25 have the highest rates of incarceration and recidivism and show a high racial disparity, with Black youths as much as nine times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers. That’s without any research indicating that youth of color behavior is significantly different than white youth”.

The American Bar Association urges state governments to support reform of sentencing emerging adults as noted in this 2024 article on [Emerging Adult Justice](#): “Opportunities also exist to enact legislation to reform existing adult criminal legal systems, better equipping them to respond to the specific developmental needs and circumstances of emerging adults. These can include mechanisms for specialized considerations at sentencing, such as downgraded sentence guidelines, departures from mandatory minimum guidelines, or preventing convictions during emerging adulthood from counting towards “habitual offender status” or three-strikes sanctions.”

I hope you will support Maine youth, families and communities by supporting LD 1113.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson  
Sanford, Maine.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/left-to-die-in-prison-emerging-adults-25-and-younger-sentenced-to-life-without-parole/#footnote-ref-6>

<https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/more-support-less-punishment-getting-young-people-on-a-better-path>

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/criminal\\_justice/resources/magazine/2024-winter/americas-recent-attempts-apply-research-policies-practices/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/criminal_justice/resources/magazine/2024-winter/americas-recent-attempts-apply-research-policies-practices/)