

MORE THAN WORDS

ISSUE & POLICY PRIORITIES



RAISE THE AGE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

Young adults, ages 18-20, should be moved out of the adult justice system and into the juvenile system. This move is supported by brain science and allows for greater diversion, education, and services. This will make our community safer and more just, especially for youth of color.

The Juvenile Court and Department of Youth Services (DYS) have capacity and expertise to do this:

- The Juvenile Court and DYS are far better equipped to engage families of young adults 18-20 than the adult system.
- Between 2014 and 2020, the total number of all juvenile cases, including child welfare cases, dropped by 39%.
- Over 70% of DYS youth have current or recent child welfare involvement and are served by the Juvenile Court. Getting pushed into the adult system often leads to loss of Department of Children and Families (DCF) services.

Our brains continue to mature until the early-to-mid-20s:

- The brain of an 18-20 year old is really different from adult brains and much more like a 17 year old.
- Adolescents are more likely to be influenced by peers, and engage in risky and impulsive behaviors.
- Giving young people time and skills to safely mature and develop is the best strategy to stop future offending.

Putting us in the adult system makes the community less safe:

- Toxic environments, like adult jails and prisons, increase negative behaviors and make it more likely to reoffend.
- Young adults leaving adult prisons in Massachusetts have a 55% re-conviction rate, while teens leaving DYS facilities have a re-conviction rate of 22%.

Young men of color are hurt the most by these policies:

- Only 25% of young people in MA are Black or Latino, but 70% of young adults in state prisons are people of color.
- Black and Latino young adults are 3.2 and 1.7 times as likely to be imprisoned as their white peers.

We need and deserve an education, even when we make mistakes:

- 47% of people in adult jails have not completed high school, while young people in DYS are required to attend school every day and have easier access to special education resources.
- An adult record cripples us before we have a chance to be adults. It creates a barrier for employment, education, professional licensure, and service in the armed forces.

More Than Words is nonprofit social enterprise that empowers youth ages 16-24 who are in the foster care system, court involved, homeless, or out of school to take charge of their lives by taking charge of a business. At locations in Boston and Waltham, young people run a \$3.7M business and learn critical job skills, while simultaneously making progress in education, work, and life.

The Power is Yours is a group of More Than Words youth and graduates working together with staff on a youth-driven policy agenda and advocacy activities. Our priorities include raising the age on juvenile justice and securing supportive transition planning for young people leaving public systems like the Department of Children and Families.