

WASHINGTON DEFENDER ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS

February 2, 2021

Dear Chair Darneille and Human Services, Reentry and Rehabilitation Committee Members:

Thank you for hearing SB 5123: Creating a developmentally appropriate response to youth who commit sexual offenses. We support the second substitute bill of SB 5123 bill without amendments. This version of the bill is agreed upon by the Washington Defender Association (WDA), Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (WACDL), King County Department of Public Defense and Team Child. Furthermore, we understand the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys also is in agreement with the second substitute bill.

Youth registration is a harmful failed policy that undermines public safety. This bill will mitigate some of this harm. Specifically:

- Registration fails to support victims or prevent harmful behavior and puts young people at increased risk of suicide and sexual assault.
- Requiring youth convicted in juvenile court to register as sex offenders neither prevents abuse nor increases public safety. Research has demonstrated that youth who commit sexual offenses are extremely unlikely to reoffend. Adolescents continue to evolve intellectually and emotionally throughout their teenage years. They are particularly amenable to interventions that stress rehabilitation and treatment.
- Youth of color are disproportionately convicted of sex offenses and required to register as sex offenders. More than 2,000 individuals currently are on the state's sex offender registry for offenses committed as youth. Black and American Indian people are over-represented in the population of registered sex offenders.

We strongly urge you to pass this second substitute bill without further amendments. Thank you for this committee's work and commitment to Washington State's youth. Please feel free to contact Neil Beaver: (509) 979-9550 or neil.beaver@gmail.com, or Ali Hohman: (425) 315-3837 or ali@defensenet.org for further information.

Sincerely,

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