

SAMPLE SUPPORT LETTER FOR SB 1391

Easy Steps to Write your Own Letter

1. Look up [who represents you here](#), and put your Assembly Member's name into the letter above the address and after "Dear".
2. Add in **your name, address, and email** in the letter. Make the contents of the letter your own by adding your thoughts!
3. Sign!
4. Send!

After finishing your letter, please:

- a. Fax to Senator Lara, Atten: Michelle: (916)651-4933;
- b. Send a second copy to HRW by fax: (310)477-4622 or email: estradl@hrw.org with subject: "SB 1391 Support Letter"

OR

- c. If you don't have a fax, email it to estradl@hrw.org we will send it in for you!

WHEN FINISHED, ERASE ALL RED

[Date]

[Your name and address]

The Honorable [Your Assembly Member's name]

California State Assembly Member

State Capitol Building

Sacramento, CA 95814

Fax: (916) 651-4933

Re: **Support for S.B. 1391 (Lara)**

Ending Transfer of 14- and 15-Year-Old Children to Adult Court

Dear Assembly Member [Your Assembly Member's name]:

I am writing in support of S.B. 1391 (Lara), which would end the transfer to adult court of children under age 16 to adult court. Senate Bill 1391 recognizes that 14- and 15-year-olds should not be treated like adults in the criminal justice system

[Say something about yourself, such as: "My wife and I run our own business in the San Fernando Valley." Or: "I am a mother of four, and grandmother of three." Or: "I am an attorney practicing in San Mateo, where I am active in the Democratic Party." Or: "I am work at a nursery and am involved in my children's school as a volunteer." Or: "I am a survivor of violent crime and active in my community."]

[Then say something about why you support this bill, such as: “I want our laws to be just.” Or: “I think youth should get a second chance, and not spend the rest of their lives in prison.” Or: “I believe young people should be treated differently than adults in the criminal system.” Or: “I believe California should uphold human rights in its laws.”]

[Pick just one or two of the paragraphs below and erase the others. Remember that the more a letter is your own, and written in your voice, the more powerful it will be. Use your own words if you have time and delete as many of the paragraphs below as possible. It is most powerful when you tie the reasons to your own experience and perspective. Your letter can be short! Shorter is better.]

Research supports this fact: Young people fare better when they are kept in the juvenile system. They are less likely to commit new crimes when they have had age-appropriate services and education. The juvenile justice system offers this; the adult system does not. By keeping 14- and 15-year-olds in the juvenile system S.B. 1391 will help to ensure that youth receive the treatment, counseling, and education they need to develop into healthy, successful adults.

The children affected by S.B. 1391 are really young: many are still in middle school. They are not old enough to have a driver’s license, and yet this state’s law allows them to be sentenced to decades in state prison. Many of them have unmet needs related to abuse, disabilities, behavioral health issues, and poverty. They are individuals with tremendous, often untapped potential. They are also the young people who need the most help, but California relegates them to a system where they will receive the least.

Although the adult prison system is attempting to improve its capacity to provide rehabilitation, it pales in comparison with what the juvenile system has to offer. In the juvenile system, young people are required to participate in the same compulsory education provided to all children. They are also required to participate in individualized programs and services designed to address behavioral health, disabilities, trauma, and other needs. In the state prison system, these kinds of services are not only not required, and they are often not available. Also, staff in local and state juvenile facilities receive special training to address the needs of adolescents, something that is missing in the state prison system.

Almost all of these young people will be released to the community at some point, and that makes it critically important they receive the services designed to help them to succeed upon release. The research is clear that youth kept in the juvenile system are less likely to commit new crimes in the future. Also, for these younger children accused of serious crimes, the juvenile system will have jurisdiction up to age 25, and the ability to incarcerate them in the Division of Juvenile Facilities for up to 10 years, with additional time for youth proved to still be dangerous. This is plenty of time to address their rehabilitative needs. Retaining these young people in the juvenile system is wise from the standpoint of public safety.

Senate Bill 1391 is consistent with modern understanding of adolescent development and brain science. Widely accepted neuroscientific research shows the human brain is not fully developed until the mid-twenties, and that many of the impulsive, risk-taking behaviors of young teenagers reflect developmental stages that most young people grow out of in a few years. Very few youth grow up to be career criminals, even if they committed a serious offense as a 14- or 15-year-old.

California only began to allow the transfer of 14- and 15-year-olds in 1995 during a “get tough” era fueled by widespread, later discredited fears about violent juveniles. Senate Bill 1391 would help to restore a more sensible balance to our laws by recognizing that younger youth should not be handled in the adult system.

For these reasons, I support S.B. 1391, and ask that you support this important piece of legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,