

The Post and Courier

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Life sentences

Your July 29 story titled "Long terms for young draw fire" highlights a single case, but in fact there are 26 juveniles in South Carolina serving life sentences without parole. They committed serious, even heinous offenses as children.

But we need to respond based on facts, not emotion. Before rejecting out of hand the Texas report that faults state laws that make it too easy to try and sentence children as adults, perhaps we should read it.

The statistics and research lay out facts that we can't argue with:

Children are developmentally different from adults and (at the age of 10 or 12) are not fully formed characters. The United States is the only nation in the world that sentences juveniles to life without parole or imposes harsh sentences on children.

Groups ranging from the American Bar Association to faith-based organizations have urged that we not demonize such children but seek to redeem, to diagnose and rehabilitate them.

Abating the swelling numbers of children in jail is both socially and fiscally imperative. Research certainly shows that youth who have initial contact with juvenile justice systems are much more likely to be incarcerated as adults. Statistics are just as clear that in the long run, rehabilitative and diversion programs are far more cost-effective than secure detention.

We would be safer as a society, as well as more humane, if we looked to the facts when we judge our juveniles.

The point of "corrections" is not just to punish but to rehabilitate. If we can't aim to do that with our children, how can we call ourselves a just society?

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