

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 10, 2020

MEDIA CONTACT

Miriam Krinsky

E: krinskym@krinsky.la

C: 818-416-5218

New Polling Reveals Majority of Voters Want to End Extreme Sentences for Children

Today, Data for Progress, The Justice Collaborative Institute and Fair and Just Prosecution jointly released a polling report exploring voter sentiment across the country regarding extreme sentences for children and how they should be addressed going forward. The poll showed that voters believe young people who commit criminal offenses are capable of change and that our youth justice system should be focused on prevention and rehabilitation, rather than punishment. Further, the poll shows that a majority of voters believe that children should not be subject to life without parole sentences that offer no hope or opportunity for a second chance.

“Voters across the country are waking up to the flaws in our criminal legal system and calling for fundamental change,” said **Justin Levinson, Faculty Director of [The Justice Collaborative Institute](#)**. “There is no better place to start than how we treat people serving extreme decades-long sentences for offenses committed as children. If we truly believe in the power of redemption, and what settled research tells us about aging out of crime, life without parole for children is not only an inhumane practice that destroys lives and families, but also one that does nothing to promote public safety.”

Key findings of the poll show:

- Over two-thirds of voters, including over two-thirds of Republicans, believe that all children, including those convicted of crimes, have the capacity for positive change.
- Over two-thirds of voters, consistent across political affiliation, believe that a person who committed a crime as a child should be paroled from prison if a parole board concludes that the person does not pose a threat to public safety.
- Fifty-seven percent of voters, including over 50 percent of Republicans, agree that no one should be sentenced to life in prison without the opportunity for parole for a crime committed as a child.
- Over two-thirds of voters believe that lengthy sentences received by children should be reviewed after no more than 15 years, with the opportunity for release if they no longer pose a danger to the community.

“While the Supreme Court has limited juvenile life without parole sentences, far too many individuals sentenced to these terms still remain condemned to die behind bars,” said **Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of [Fair and Just Prosecution](#)**. “Now as hundreds of thousands across the country take to the streets protesting police violence and racial injustice, we have a duty to upend these arcane practices and an opportunity to rethink how our criminal legal system can build stronger and safer communities.”

During the tough-on-crime era of the 1990s, the “superpredator” myth targeting young Black men and

boys proliferated, resulting in the nation's biggest spike in life without parole sentences for young people. According to the [Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth](#), 75 percent of all children sentenced to life without parole were sentenced during and after the 1990s. As of 2016, over 60 percent of youth serving life without parole sentences are Black.

As noted in today's report, "this tide has since turned, and, in some respects, change happened rapidly. In 2012, only five states had banned life-without-parole sentences for young people. Today, a majority of states either ban the practice or have no one currently serving such a sentence."

"We can no longer ignore the disparate impact of these sentences. To do so would be to subvert the will of the people who are speaking out daily in the streets and in the halls of government across the country," said **Sean McElwee, Co-founder and Executive Director of Data for Progress**. "Now is the time to take bold, decisive action that is evidence-based, recognizes the humanity of young people and begins to repair the harm that has been done to far too many people and their communities."

For more, read the [report](#) and watch FJP's new video, "[Ending Juvenile Life Without Parole](#)," to hear from experts, prosecutors and those who were incarcerated as children on this timely and important issue.

###

Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP's work, visit <http://www.fairandjustprosecution.org/> or follow us on Facebook [@FairAndJustProsecution](#).