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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

The Coalition to Protect Raise The Age: Build Futures, Invest in Youth to Hold Rallies in Support of Raise the Age Following Governor Hochul's State of the State Address

Former Law Enforcement, Elected Officials, Youth, Advocates, and Impacted New Yorkers Demand Lawmakers Fully Preserve the Landmark Law

Attendees Call on Albany to Streamline Access to \$1 Billion Tied Up to Support Raise the Age, Pass the Youth Justice Innovation Fund

(CITY HALL, NY) — [The Coalition to Protect Raise The Age: Build Futures, Invest In Youth](#) held a press conference and rally on the steps of City Hall today in response to Governor Kathy Hochul's State of the State address. The coalition urged lawmakers to preserve New York's Raise the Age law, streamline access to the nearly [\\$1 billion](#) in state funds allocated to support the law that remains unspent, and pass the [Youth Justice Innovation Fund](#), which would create additional pathways for unspent state dollars to reach counties and community-based organizations. Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, former New York City Department of Probation Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Operations Gineen Gray, Assembly Member Latrice Walker, Council Member Althea Stevens, and Council Member Nantasha Williams also joined the coalition in support of their demands.

The Coalition represents more than 220 organizations from across the state and is committed to preserving New York's landmark Raise the Age law, combating misinformation, and promoting investments in youth that deliver true community safety statewide.

In April 2017, Albany enacted historic legislation raising the age a person is automatically prosecuted as an adult in New York to 18. Before that, [New York had the shameful distinction](#) of being one of only two states in the country — along with North Carolina — to charge *all* 16- and 17-year-olds in adult criminal court, subjecting teenagers who were not even eligible to vote to permanent criminal records and adult prison sentences.

Since the law went into effect in 2018, Raise the Age has advanced a more just and effective approach to youth accountability. The law emphasizes rehabilitation, education, and community-based alternatives that give many young people the opportunity to change course while promoting lasting public safety. [Decades of data show](#) that

treating children as adults in the criminal legal system does not reduce crime or violence. Additionally, data from New York City shows that, year after year, children under 18 are responsible for a smaller share of violent crime than they were a decade ago — before the Raise the Age law took effect.

Last month, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice released a report showing that youth ages 16 and 17 - the only age group affected by New York's Raise the Age law - [are not driving crime trends](#). Since 2018, the share of felony and violent felony arrests attributable to young people has remained stable, even as overall arrest numbers have fluctuated. Youth are also reoffending at rates at or below pre-Raise the Age levels. These findings reinforce what we see every day in our work: when young people receive services and programming, they are supported and engaged, and public safety is enhanced.

The Raise the Age law ensures that [young people accused of serious offenses are still held accountable](#). All felony cases against 16- and 17-year-olds begin in adult criminal court. Cases involving allegations of significant physical injury, display of a deadly weapon, or sexual offenses — or where the judge finds “extraordinary circumstances” — remain in adult court, where adult sentencing applies. And for youth prosecuted for serious offenses in family court, judges can impose a range of potential dispositions including incarceration.

In addition to the 220 groups statewide that support the law, as well as today's guest speakers, [Mayor Zohran Mamdani](#) and leaders in law enforcement — including [Kings County District Attorney Eric Gonzalez](#) — also oppose regressive changes to Raise the Age.

The Coalition stated: “Raise the Age is working exactly as intended. The data are clear, year after year: young people are not driving crime, and treating children as children makes our communities safer. Instead of rolling back this landmark law based on misinformation, Albany must fully commit to its success by unlocking the nearly \$1 billion already allocated to support youth, families, and communities. We urge lawmakers to preserve Raise the Age, streamline access to these critical funds, and pass the Youth Justice Innovation Fund so investments can finally reach the counties and community-based organizations doing this work every day.”

“As the new year begins, we're seeing old, harmful narratives resurface—criminalizing young New Yorkers instead of giving them the support they need,” said **Assemblywoman Latrice Walker (D-55)**. “Rolling back Raise the Age, a law that has dramatically reduced youth incarceration, is a dangerous distraction. The real failure is that nearly \$1 billion for community-based youth services is sitting unused, while New York City is shut out entirely. Our young people need investments in care and opportunity—not a return to failed, punitive policies.”

“Our young people deserve more than a pathway into the justice system; they deserve a pathway home. Raise the Age has proven that investing in young people makes our communities safer, but the failure to fully fund community-based programs puts that progress and too many futures at risk. New York must stop underfunding youth justice and start investing in real public safety,” said **New York City Council Member Althea Stevens, 16th District in the Bronx**.

“New York City's young people cannot wait. They deserve immediate, well-resourced pathways to safe, productive futures,” said **Council Member Dr. Nantasha Williams**. “Raise the Age is working, but the City was carved out of funding for the very programs that keep youth out of incarceration and rooted in their communities. This underinvestment has real consequences every day. Albany must act now by creating the Youth Justice Innovation Fund to get resources directly to the community-based organizations doing this lifesaving work. At the same time, New York City must deliver a comprehensive youth justice plan that expands culturally responsive education, funds real and accessible youth employment opportunities, and centers the leadership and lived experience of young people. Anything less is a failure of our responsibility to this generation.”

“When young people are exposed to education and resources being poured into them, they become the change they want to see in the world and their communities,” said **Patrick Edge, Youth Engagement Specialist at CASES**. “Young people need the State to fund real resources, so they can grow into future leaders.”

“When Raise the Age finally became law, I celebrated,” said **Gineen Gray, former Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation**. “We have a moral responsibility to ensure our young people can learn true accountability, and we can do so by investing in them. To fulfill the promise of Raise the Age, and continue to enhance public safety, we must ensure that trusted community-based organizations can access the resources needed to support robust programming and services for our young people. The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would unlock that funding, and I am proud to stand with young people and other advocates in calling for its passage.”

“I spent 25 years in New York State prisons for something that happened when I was just 17 years old. I know firsthand that the 'tough on crime' policies of the past didn't make us safer—they only deepen trauma and rob young people of their futures. True public safety comes from early intervention, not incarceration. Today, through the Youth Justice Council at the Legal Action Center, I work with young people who were given the support I never received—and now they are leaders in their communities. We cannot go back to a failed system. Raise the Age must be protected, and New York must continue investing in youth-centered solutions that actually work,” said **Jason Rodriguez, Policy Associate at the Legal Action Center**.

“All of the data shows us that Raise the Age has been a resounding success, and we must ensure that it continues to deliver on its promise. Advancing approaches rooted in rehabilitation, education, and community not only create pathways to success—they make New York stronger and safer. Reversing the law would ignore the evidence and harm youth, families, and communities. Albany now has a responsibility to create the Youth Justice Innovation Fund and unlock the \$1 billion in already-allocated funds so they reach the organizations doing this work on the ground. I was proud to stand on the steps of City Hall today to advocate for these initiatives, and will continue to do so until every young person has access to the resources, support, and opportunities they need to thrive,” said **Messiah Ramkissoon, Associate Executive Director of the Youth Justice Network**.

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