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Tuesday, April 25, 2023

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DPI-NR 2023-28

## Supporting youth and youth justice

*Testimony as prepared for delivery by Assistant State Superintendent Tricia Collins*

MINOCQUA – *The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today released the following testimony, as prepared for delivery, to be provided at an upcoming Joint Committee on Finance listening session on the 2023-25 biennial budget.*

My name is Tricia Collins, and I am an assistant state superintendent at the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly to respectfully submit the following testimony in support of the youth justice budget initiative that returns 17-year-olds to the youth justice system.

Raising the age for automatic placement in adult court from 17 to 18 will lower recidivism rates and make our communities safer, is responsive to our understanding of brain development, will allow us to better address the mental health challenges our children face, and is fiscally responsible. Moreover, this initiative has bipartisan support, and enacting it will improve outcomes for Wisconsin's youth and our state. The education services available to children placed in the youth justice system are different from the adult system, and the degree to which children can focus on their education when surrounded by their peers is immeasurable. We at the DPI often speak to the importance of safe and supportive learning environments being essential to an effective education. The children in our justice systems deserve the same support. In a state with such egregious racial disparities in incarceration and educational outcomes, we cannot continue policy that maintains those inequities.

We are currently facing a youth mental health crisis and the youth in our justice system are enduring these challenges at an unparalleled rate. This is unacceptable. By raising the age, we are connecting youth to the systems that are more appropriately equipped to support them.

(more)

But most of all, raising the age is the right thing because it puts our kids first. 17-year-olds are children. A child raised on survival and a child raised on love and support become two very different adults. Our Wisconsin children deserve to be treated as children. I urge you to raise the age.

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