JUVENILE LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE

In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Miller v. Alabama* decided that it was unconstitutional to impose *mandatory* life without parole sentences on juveniles. Life without parole remains a sentencing option for juveniles in many states. The United States is the only country in the world that imposes such a sentence on youth.

Nationwide, more than 2,500 individuals are serving LWOP sentences they received as juveniles; 73% of children who received a LWOP sentence were 13 or 14 years old when they offended.

The psychological research is clear that juveniles have an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, are more vulnerable to peer pressure, are less capable than adults of perceiving and comprehending long term consequences, and have much less control of their environment in ways that are transient and change with age. Yet many state laws view children as wholly responsible and understanding of their actions, and incapable of rehabilitation.

Mostly, it is black youth who are viewed as irredeemable. According to The Sentencing Project:

* 42.4% of juvenile LWOP sentences are for an African American youth convicted of killing a white individual, even though that exact crime constitutes just 23.2% of juvenile arrests for murder.
* Although 6.4% of juvenile arrests for murder include a white youth killing an African American youth, just 3.6% of juvenile LWOP sentences involve that crime.

Before they turn 18 years old, these youth are written off, hidden away, and left to grow old and die in prison. In Rhode Island, it costs more than $40,000 per year to incarcerate a single individual.

Although no juveniles are currently serving LWOP in Rhode Island, the option remains on the books. Legislation before the General Assembly this year (H5650/S 0389) would remove this option, as 12 other states and the District of Columbia have already done.

Help end juvenile life without parole.

*For more information, please visit* [*www.riaclu.org*](http://www.riaclu.org)*.*

*American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island*

*128 Dorrance Street Suite 220*

*Providence, RI 02903*

*P: 401-831-7171 F: 401-831-7175*