

Vermont Governor Signs Historic Bill to End Prosecution of Children Under 12

New law positions Vermont as a national leader in advancing human rights protections for youth and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, April 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Governor Phil Scott (R-VT) signed into law H.2, a groundbreaking child justice reform bill that raises the minimum age of prosecution to 12 years old and eliminates carve outs that previously allowed younger children to be charged with certain offenses. With the enactment of this law, Vermont joins Massachusetts as a national leader in ending the criminalization of childhood and prioritizing treatment and services for behavioral issues that arise in elementary school-aged children.

“This bill positions Vermont as a national leader and moves us closer to recognized human rights standards around the world in raising the age of prosecution to 12 years old,” said Representative Barbara Rachelson, a co-sponsor of the bill. “But it is also bittersweet. Despite the protections this bill will afford our youngest citizens, it will also delay the implementation of Raise the Age, which was designed to recognize the same developmental immaturity of the emerging adult population.”

H.2 represents one of the most impactful reforms Vermont has enacted to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. By excluding the youngest children from legal prosecution and replacing punitive responses with trauma-informed support, the state is shifting away from criminalization and toward healing-centered, developmentally appropriate practices.

“Vermont’s juvenile justice system has several goals: To protect public safety. To connect youth to age-appropriate services that reduce recidivism. And to shield youth from the adverse impact of a criminal record, helping them become responsible and productive members of the community,” said House Judiciary Chair and bill sponsor, Martin LaLonde. “This change recognizes that children are fundamentally different from adults. Their brains are not fully developed—and there are other, better ways to handle individuals in this age group who break the law.”

The legislation was strongly supported by [Human Rights for Kids](#), a national child advocacy organization that helped lead the effort. “Excluding the youngest children from prosecution and entanglement in complex legal systems leads to better outcomes for youth and their families and increases public safety by providing children with more direct access to the services needed

to address any underlying trauma or negative behavioral concerns,” said Teresa Kominos, Policy Counsel for Human Rights for Kids. “This bill addresses this need in two very important ways—first by raising the minimum age of prosecution to 12 years old, but also by repealing any exceptions to the law based on specific offenses, recognizing that young children, regardless of the crime charged, do not have the capacity to form criminal intent.”

With this victory, Vermont sets a model for other states across the country. Human Rights for Kids will continue working with policymakers and advocates nationwide to ensure every child is treated with dignity, compassion, and fairness.

ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS FOR KIDS

Human Rights for Kids is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the human rights of children. We use an integrated, multi-faceted approach which consists of research & public education, coalition building & grassroots mobilization, and policy advocacy & strategic litigation to advance critical human rights on behalf of children in the United States and around the world. Human Rights for Kids is particularly grateful to our partner, The Just Trust, for supporting our state-level advocacy on behalf of children around the country.

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