

Hawaii Leads Nation: Ends Extreme Sentencing & Adult Prison for Kids, Embraces Trauma-Informed Justice

New Laws Prohibit Extreme Sentencing, Bar Incarceration of Youth in Adult Prisons, and Set a Minimum Age of 12 for Prosecution

HONOLULU, HI, UNITED STATES, June 30, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a landmark victory for

“

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Governor Josh Green, M.D.

children’s rights and trauma-informed justice, Hawaii Governor Josh Green has signed a trio of transformative bills—SB 544, SB 691, and SB 694—making Hawaii one of the safest and best states in the country when it comes to protecting the human rights of children in the justice system.

“As a physician and public servant, I believe we have a moral obligation to protect the well-being of all

children—especially those who have experienced trauma, abuse, or hardship,” said Governor Josh Green, M.D. “These new laws reflect Hawaii’s deep commitment to treating kids with compassion and dignity, not punishment. By keeping children out of adult jails and prisons, ending mandatory minimum sentences for youth, and ensuring judges consider the full context of a child’s life, we are creating a justice system that sees children as they are: still growing, still healing, and still full of potential.”

Together, these reforms ban the incarceration of youth in adult jails and prisons, end mandatory minimum sentencing for children, and establish a minimum age of 12 for prosecution—placing Hawaii among a small group of states leading the nation in child-centered criminal justice policy.

“These reforms recognize that all children deserve to have their human rights protected even when they make mistakes,” said Senator Mike Gabbard, who championed the legislation. “For our youngest na keiki, that means addressing behavioral issues with treatment and services outside of carceral settings. It also means that if incarceration becomes necessary for older youth, they are treated in an age-appropriate and trauma-informed manner. These laws will ensure our keiki receive that grace and the opportunity to heal from the trauma that often leads to their system involvement.”

Highlights of the New Laws:

SB 694: Prohibits the housing of children in adult jails, lock-ups, and prisons. This law addresses alarming data showing youth held with adults face dramatically higher risks of sexual abuse, physical assault, and suicide.

SB 691: Establishes a minimum age of 12 for prosecuting or adjudicating children delinquent, with no exceptions. Hawaii becomes just the third state in the nation with this level of protection.

SB 544: Ends mandatory minimum sentencing for youth and requires judges to consider a child's full history—including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—before sentencing. Hawaii joins just five other states that have eliminated mandatory minimums for children prosecuted as adults.

"We are grateful for the moral leadership of Governor Green and Senator Gabbard in making Hawaii the best state in the country when it comes to protecting the human rights of system-involved youth," said James Dold, Founder and CEO of [Human Rights for Kids](#). "Hawaii is a shining example of how data, science, and compassion can come together to create policies that prioritize healing and opportunity over punishment and harm."

These sweeping reforms come at a critical time. Research shows that children exposed to incarceration, solitary confinement, and harsh sentencing are more likely to experience further trauma, have their brain development disrupted, and face increased risks of recidivism.

"Arrest and incarceration are deeply traumatic, punitive, and expensive responses to childhood behavior," said Jolene Forman, Chief Program and Advocacy Officer of [The Just Trust](#), a national funder of youth justice reform. "We applaud any state seeking alternative models of accountability for kids to reduce future harm for individuals, their families, and broader communities."

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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