

# Governor Green Signs SB 2108 Into Law, Advancing Trauma-Informed Youth Justice Reform in Hawai'i

*Human Rights for Kids Helped Develop and Advocate for Landmark Legislation Protecting Trafficked and Abused Youth*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Human Rights for Kids (HRFK) applauds Governor Josh Green for signing Senate Bill 2108 into law, landmark legislation that strengthens protections for children in Hawai'i's legal system and advances a more trauma-informed approach to youth justice.

SB 2108 reforms Hawai'i's judicial waiver process governing when children may be transferred into adult criminal court. The legislation requires courts to consider additional developmental and trauma-related factors when evaluating whether a child should be prosecuted as an adult and mandates that Family Court retain jurisdiction where a child was trafficked, sexually abused, or raped by the alleged victim involved in the offense.

Hawaii is now the second state to completely ban the prosecution of trafficked and abused children in these circumstances as adults.

Human Rights for Kids worked collaboratively with lawmakers, advocates, impacted individuals, and coalition partners to advance these trauma-informed reforms grounded in adolescent development science and the lived experiences of children impacted by abuse and exploitation.

Senator Mike Gabbard, who championed this reform said "This law continues the work of ensuring our criminal justice system is trauma-informed and grounded in adolescent brain development science by recognizing and considering the lived experiences of children impacted by trauma, abuse and exploitation by mandating courts to fully evaluate each of these factors before a child can be prosecuted as an adult."

The legislation reflects growing national recognition that children who experience trafficking, sexual violence, abuse, and adverse childhood experiences are uniquely vulnerable within the legal system and require developmentally appropriate interventions focused on rehabilitation and healing.

Research consistently demonstrates that children prosecuted in adult court face substantially

higher risks of physical violence, sexual abuse, suicide, and long-term psychological harm, while also experiencing poorer public safety outcomes and increased recidivism.

“Adult criminal justice systems were not built with children in mind. They do not account for adolescence, trauma or the developmental differences that make children fundamentally less culpable than adults or the impact that exposure to repeated trauma has on that development. SB 2108 is a necessary step in ensuring that Hawai‘i’s youth justice system responds to children with fairness, accountability, and compassion rather than punishment alone. Children who have experienced severe trauma, trafficking, and abuse should not be waived into the adult criminal legal system without courts fully considering the circumstances that shaped their lives,” said Teresa Kominos, Senior Policy Counsel at Human Rights for Kids.

SB 2108 also preserves Family Court jurisdiction over certain subsequent acts involving youth transferred for criminal proceedings and strengthens judicial review standards to ensure that transfer decisions appropriately account for youth status and trauma history.

Human Rights for Kids commends the leadership of the bill’s legislative sponsor, Senator Gabbard, youth advocates, survivor leaders, community organizations, and directly impacted individuals who helped move the legislation forward.

Human Rights for Kids will continue working nationwide to advance policies that protect the human rights of children and ensure that youth legal systems reflect modern science on adolescent development, trauma, and rehabilitation.

#### About Human Rights for Kids

Human Rights for Kids is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing and protecting the human rights of children in the United States. Through advocacy, public education, coalition building, and strategic litigation, the organization works to end cruel and developmentally inappropriate practices against children in the legal system and promote policies consistent with the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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