

American Psychiatric Association

1000 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 1825
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone 703.907.7300
Fax 703.907.1085
E-mail apa@psych.org
Internet www.psych.org

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March 20, 2009

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman, United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member, United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Leahy and Specter,

It's our understanding that legislation to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, S 678 was reintroduced a few days ago. The extent to which juveniles should be transferred or "waived" into the adult system may well be addressed in the context of this reauthorization. I am writing to share the position of the American Psychiatric Association on this issue. Specifically, we are concerned by the recent increase in the number of adolescents charged, tried and sentenced as adults.

As you are aware, over 7,500 juveniles are currently incarcerated in adult jails. Such facilities are not equipped to safely house these young people. Research demonstrates that they are at increased risk of attack, injury and suicide when compared to juveniles housed in programs specifically for adolescents.

Putting juveniles in adult jails is also counterproductive. Youth who are transferred to adult courts are 34% more likely to be rearrested than those retained in the juvenile system. Consigning juveniles to months or years in adult jails and prisons also makes it harder for them to rebuild their lives. Our programs and policies should be designed to keep adolescents in appropriate facilities, with access to the comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation services they need. As President of the APA, I urge you to address these issues by strengthening juvenile justice policies and by funding programs which keep youth out of adult courts and jails.



I have enclosed a copy of the APA's position statement on this topic for your information. If hearings are held on this legislation, we would be happy to arrange testimony, as appropriate. We would also be happy to meet with you or your staff to provide additional information regarding our position. Please feel free to contact Lizbet Boroughs, Deputy Director of APA's Department of Government Relations at lboroughs@psych.org or 703/254-3336 if and when we can be of assistance.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nada Stotland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nada" being the most prominent.

Nada Stotland, M.D., M.P.H.
President
American Psychiatric Association

cc: