

RAISE the AGE | NY

Resource Guide for Faith Leaders in New York State

New York is one of only two states where youth ages 16 and 17 are automatically treated as adults in the criminal justice system, regardless of the severity of the offense. We have a moral imperative to do better for our young people and communities.

Across the religious spectrum, people of faith can draw on the texts and teachings of their religious traditions to hear and respond to the holy and eternal call for love and justice that urges special care and protection for children – especially those who are most vulnerable.

Last year nearly 30,000 16- and 17-year-olds were arrested in New York and processed in the adult justice system – nearly 70% were arrested for misdemeanors. When these young people are arrested, there is no requirement to have their parents notified, or to have a parent or guardian present during questioning. They are held in adult jails, and if convicted, they face barriers resulting from their criminal conviction for the rest of their lives.

An Opportunity to Put our Faith into Action

As people of faith, we must take a stand to change the odds for children with urgency and persistence. This is an opportunity to put our faith into action to meet the needs of young people who are exposed to harm, not provided necessary age appropriate support through the adult criminal justice system, and who are more likely to return to the justice system in the future compared to youth treated in the juvenile justice system.

It is not only a time to pray, but also a time to put prayer into action. It is not only a time to study, but also a time to serve children directly. It is not only a time to sing, but also a time to speak out to elected leaders and others about the need for justice.

Identify a sacred text of your choosing that highlights the need to Raise the Age. Christian sample:

Proverbs 31:8-9. Speak up for [those unable to speak], for the rights of all the unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy.

About this Issue

- New York is one of only two states where youth are automatically treated as adults in the criminal justice system, regardless of the severity of the offense, at age 16. The vast majority of states set the age of criminal responsibility at age 18. While a few states remain at age 17, only two states – New York and North Carolina – automatically consider youth to be adults at age 16.
- New York's antiquated law is still in place despite research that has demonstrated that this practice jeopardizes public safety by increasing recidivism rates. Youth who go through the adult justice system are more likely to be rearrested than youth who go through the juvenile justice system.
- Youth in the adult criminal justice system have elevated rates of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and have heightened risk of suicide.
- Saddling youth with adult criminal convictions negatively impacts their ability to attain higher education, get a job, and obtain housing, amongst other life-long impacts.
- The Governor and the Legislature need to hear from faithful New Yorkers like you, who want a more just system that will not only provide youth with the age-appropriate services they need, but also keep communities safer.

Call to Action

There are many ways to be involved and be heard.

Contact Elected Officials

Online Action Alert: Send a letter to Governor Cuomo, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Majority Leader Flanagan, IDC Leader Jeff Klein, and your own state representatives urging them to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York. Visit RaisetheAgeNY.com and click on Take Action.

Monthly Call-In Days for Justice: Call your elected officials on the 16th of every month in 2017, to remind legislators that New York is one of only two states that automatically prosecutes ALL young people as adults at age 16, and that we must change this. With this one-click alert, enter your address to get the numbers for your representatives and a script you can use to call them: bit.ly/rta2017.

Take Action in Your Community

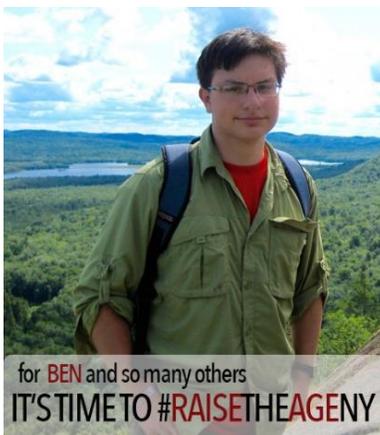
Bring Raise the Age to your community and congregation:

- Organize a delegation from your faith community to visit the local offices of your Assembly Member and Senator.
- Feature RTA in your congregation's newsletter and meetings, and encourage your congregation to let New York State legislators know that we must raise the age this year.
- Host a letter-writing campaign at your place of worship.
- Invite elected officials to visit your congregation and let them hear from you about why we must raise the age.
- Check out our social media guide for sample Facebook posts and tweets in support of raise the age.

Incorporate Raise the Age in Prayer

Include Raise the Age in your calls to worship. Christian sample:

The love of God is manifest in the Word made flesh and revealed as God's own child. As brothers and sisters of Jesus, let us bring before God our prayer for all children. Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities, especially to speak up with the most vulnerable children.



Additional Ways Connect with the Statewide Campaign

Please visit RaisetheAgeNY.com for news and information. You can contact us via:

- Email: NYRaiseTheAge@gmail.com
- Phone: 646-820-5645
- Twitter: [@RaiseTheAgeNY](https://twitter.com/RaiseTheAgeNY) and the hashtag [#RaiseTheAgeNY](https://twitter.com/RaiseTheAgeNY)
- [Facebook.com/RaisetheAgeNY](https://www.facebook.com/RaisetheAgeNY)

