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Nassau Dems urge state to raise age for prosecution as adults

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Nassau County Legis. Laura Curran is shown during a meeting of the legislature in Mineola on Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2015. Photo Credit: Newsday / John Paraskevas
Democratic Nassau County legislators Monday called on state lawmakers to raise to 18 the age for nonviolent offenders to be prosecuted and incarcerated as adults.

At a news conference in Mineola, Legis. Laura Curran (D-Baldwin) said juvenile offenders have a better chance of being rehabilitated and avoiding recidivism if they are incarcerated at youth jails.

New York and North Carolina are the only states to allow 16- and 17-year-old nonviolent offenders to be charged as adults and placed in adult facilities.

“If you commit a crime, no matter how old you are, you must be held accountable,” said Curran, the ranking member of the Public Safety Committee. “But we can be smarter about how we hold young people accountable.”
Angelo Pinto, who oversees the Correctional Association of New York’s Raise the Age campaign, said 33,000 16- and 17-year-olds are arrested every year and prosecuted as adults.

“Young people are unable to re-enter the community successfully because their education has been disrupted,” Pinto said. “And, they have now been acclimated to a culture of violence because they are in these facilities.”

Last month, Sen. Velmanette Montgomery (D-Brooklyn) reintroduced a bill, which died in committee last year, raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18. A companion bill in the Assembly is sponsored by Assemb. Joseph Lentol (D-Brooklyn) and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo included similar language in his 2016 budget proposal.

In December, Cuomo issued an executive order separating 16- and 17-year-olds from adult populations in jails and prisons. But the move applied only to state facilities and left the teens in a different area of the adult facilities.

A 2014 report by Cuomo’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice recommended raising the age to 18 for prosecution and incarceration as an adult.
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