

Calif Senate OKs bill on juvenile...

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adolescence and thus impulse control, planning, and critical thinking skills are still not yet fully developed. SB 399 reflects that science and provides the opportunity for compassion and rehabilitation that we should exercise with minors," said Yee, the bill's author who is also child psychologist.

The US Supreme Court, in *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551 (2005), confirmed that minors need to be considered differently than adults in sentencing. The ruling prohibited the death penalty for children due to concerns about brain development.

While there are more than 250 youth who were under the age of 18 years old when they committed crimes and were sentenced to life without parole in California, there is not a single juvenile sentenced to life without parole outside of the US. Prohibited by international law and norms, no other country in the world imposes this sentence on youth.

A recent report published by Human Rights Watch found that in many cases where juveniles were prosecuted with an adult

for the same offense, the youth received heavier sentences than their adult co-defendants.

"Sentencing children to life without parole means they will die in prison," said Elizabeth Calvin, children's rights advocate at Human Rights Watch.

"The public can be kept safe without locking children up forever for crimes committed when they were still considered too young to have the judgment to vote or drive," she said.

Despite popular belief to the contrary, Human Rights Watch found that life without parole is not reserved for children who commit the worst crimes or who show signs of being irredeemable criminals.

Nationally, it is estimated that 59 percent of youth sentenced to life without parole had no prior criminal convictions. Forty-five percent of California youth sentenced to life without parole for involvement in a murder did not actually kill the victim. Many were convicted of felony murder, or for aiding and abetting the murder, because they acted as lookouts or were participating in another felony, such as a robbery, when the murder took

place.

Of the approximately 250 youth in California serving this sentence, there are a high number of cases that have brought into question this severe sentencing.

One such case involves Anthony C., who was 16 and had never before been in trouble with the law. Anthony belonged to a "tagging crew" that paints graffiti. One day Anthony and his friend James went down to a wash (a cement-sided stream bed) to graffiti. James revealed to Anthony that he had a gun in his backpack and when another group of kids came down to the wash, James decided to rob them. James pulled out the gun, and the victim told him, "If you don't kill me, I'll kill you." At that point, Anthony thought the bluff had been called, and turned to pick up his bike. James shot the other kid.

The police told Anthony's parents that he did not need a lawyer. He was interviewed by the police and released, but later re-arrested on robbery and murder charges. Anthony was offered a 16-to-life sentence before trial if he pleaded, but he refused,

believing he was innocent. Anthony was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Charged with aiding and abetting, he was held responsible for the actions of James.

Another case involves Sara Kruzan, who was raised in Riverside by her mother who was abusive and addicted to drugs. Sarah was very vulnerable, and at age 11, a man began grooming her to become a prostitute. Soon after meeting her, he sexually assaulted her, and at 13 years old she began working as a prostitute for him. At age 16 she killed him, and for this crime was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, despite the California Youth Authority and a psychiatric evaluation determining that she was amendable to rehabilitation.

"Life without parole means absolutely no opportunity for re-

lease," said Yee. "It also means minors are often left without access to programs and rehabilitative services while in prison. This sentence was created for the worst of criminals that have no possibility of reform and it is not a humane way to handle children. While the crimes they committed caused undeniable suffering, these youth offenders are not the worst of the worst."

Nationally, 11 jurisdictions have prohibited this sentence including New York, Colorado, and the District of Columbia. Other states are considering reforms or have efforts underway to eliminate the sentence, including Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, and Washington. The oldest human rights treaty to which the US is a party, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, prohibits this sentence.

California also has the worst record in the nation for racial disparity in the imposition of life without parole for juveniles. African American youth are serving the sentence at a rate that is 18 times higher than the rate for white youth, and the rate for Hispanic youth is five times higher.

Since 1990, California has spent between \$66 million and \$83 million on incarcerating youth offenders sentenced to life without parole. To continue incarcerating the current population of youth offenders already sentenced to life without parole until their deaths in prison will cost the state approximately \$500 million. Each new youth offender given this sentence will cost the state upwards of \$2.5 million.

SB 399 will next be considered by the State Assembly. (*Inquirer.net*)

130 Las Vegas residents re-acquired...

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Act 9225, or the citizenship retention and reacquisition act, allows these individuals to reacquire said citizenship and become dual citizens of both the United States and the Philippines. As dual citizens, individuals can own land and property as well as engage in business in the Philippines. They can also travel using a Philippine passport and run for public office in the Philippines.

The Philippine government also allows these dual citizens in

the US to participate in national elections in the country.

In fact, the Arroyo administration in the Philippines is urging all Filipinos living in the United States to participate in choosing the next Philippine president in May 2010. Both Filipino citizens and those holding dual citizenship can participate in said elections.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said earlier that it is targeting one million Filipinos to participate in overseas absentee voting (OAV) in preparation

for the 2010 presidential elections in the country.

"That's why we are urging all Filipinos abroad to register now. This is an opportunity to choose our leaders. This is also our duty," Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Rafael Seguis said in a previous interview in Manila, Philippines.

At the Las Vegas consular outreach last May 23rd, 241 individuals registered for overseas absentee voting, data from PCG LA showed.

OAV was made into law in 2003 through Republic Act 9225 or the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act. Under this law, Filipinos who have reacquired their Filipino citizenship can participate in Philippine elections via OAV.

Similarly, the law allows Filipino citizens living abroad to participate in elections in the Philippines even without going back to the country.

With OAV, ballots are sent to voters by mail. The ballots need to be mailed back to the Consulate where a voter is registered.

This is the third OAV registration for overseas Filipinos after the law was passed in 2003 in time for the 2004 Philippine presidential elections. Registration period this year, for the 2010 elections, started last February and will end in August.

Meanwhile, the consular team in Las Vegas also completed 551 Philippine passport renewals during the outreach program. (*Dymphna Calica La-Putt*)



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