

To: Interested Parties

From: Sean McElwee & Molly Bernstein

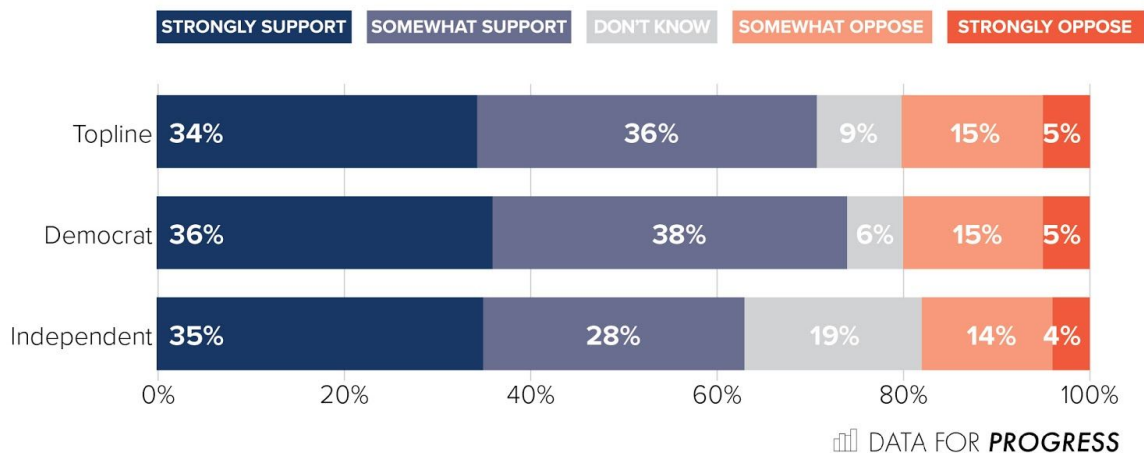
Re: D.C. Youth Justice Reform Has Overwhelming Popular Support

Date: December 16, 2020

New polling from Data for Progress and the Justice Collaborative Institute shows broad popular support for new legislation, passed by the Washington, D.C. City Council on December 15, 2020 with a veto-proof majority, to reduce prison sentences for people who committed crimes as young adults.

With a representative sample of 486 likely D.C. voters, we found that **71% support amending D.C.’s Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) to allow individuals under age 25 at the time of their offense to petition for release after serving 15 years in prison.** Currently, the law applies to people who committed their offense while under the age of 18.

The Washington, D.C. City Council is considering an amendment to the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA). The IRAA, passed in 2016, allowed people convicted of crimes as children to be considered for parole after they have served 15 years. The amendment would expand that eligibility to those convicted of crimes before the age of 25. Do you support or oppose this amendment?



Background

The Washington, D.C. City Council [voted 12-1](#) this week to pass the [Second Look Amendment Act](#), an amendment to the IRAA that will [allow more individuals sentenced as children or young adults](#) to petition for release after they have served at least 15 years of their sentence. The veto-proof vote sends the bill to Mayor Muriel Bowser’s desk,

though it will become law with or without her signature. By expanding eligibility for release or sentence reduction to individuals under the age of 25 at the time of their offense, the amendment brings the law into closer alignment with neuroscience on developmental maturity.

Both [scientists](#) and the [Supreme Court](#) have repeatedly recognized that children are cognitively different from adults. Numerous [studies](#) have shown that brain development continues through adolescence until about age 25, and that until then people are more likely to act impulsively and lack the maturity to fully understand or act based on the impact of their actions. In a series of decisions, the Supreme Court has cited this brain science to hold that children and young adults must be treated differently from fully-developed adults.

[Studies](#) have also shown that people grow out of this immaturity, and effectively age out of criminal behavior. As of August 2019, none of the nearly [20 people released from prison](#) under the IRAA have committed any crimes. Many have taken on roles as community organizers, mentors, and youth advocates.

Polling Methodology

From December 8 to December 15, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 486 likely voters in Washington, D.C. using SMS and web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 4.4 percentage points.