

Resolution in Support of the Raise the Age Wisconsin Campaign

WHEREAS the Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Wisconsin is a lead organizer in the Raise the Age Wisconsin Campaign (raisetheagewi.org), a campaign that aims to raise the age at which someone is prosecuted as an adult in Wisconsin from 17 to 18; and

WHEREAS Wisconsin is 1 of 3 states that tries all 17-year-olds as adults (raisetheagewi.org/faq); and

WHEREAS 17-year-olds in the juvenile system are more likely to avoid reincarceration, more likely to receive a high school diploma, and more likely to become productive members of society than 17-year-olds in the adult prison system (*Issue Brief* at raisetheagewi.org/advocacy); and

WHEREAS most juveniles in Wisconsin corrections facilities have mental health issues and need support not possible in the prison system (*Talking Points* at raisetheagewi.org/advocacy); and

WHEREAS juveniles comprise less than 1% of the adult prison population in Wisconsin but represent over 20% of its sexual abuse victims, a clear sign that they do not belong in adult prisons (*Talking Points* at raisetheagewi.org/advocacy); and

WHEREAS the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America clearly states in *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* social statement that “[the criminal justice system] must recognize the special needs of juvenile offenders” and that “youth are different from adults”, a principle that is “supported by a significant body of research showing that brain development is still incomplete at age 18”; and

WHEREAS the social statement goes on to say, “This church supports an end to current practices of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth in the adult criminal justice system as well as ending youth sentences of life in prison without the possibility of parole”; and

WHEREAS the social statement goes on to say, “This church calls upon its members, congregations, social ministry organizations and others to take part in building new social momentum for reforming juvenile corrections practices and treating youth as youth”; and

WHEREAS the over 700 congregations in the 6 Wisconsin synods have the collective power to turn the goals of this campaign into reality; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that this Assembly directs the Synod Bishop to produce a statement in support of the Raise the Age Wisconsin campaign and to contact the Governor of Wisconsin, the Senate Majority Leader, and the Assembly Majority Leader to advocate on behalf of the campaign; and

RESOLVED, that this Assembly calls upon all congregations and worshipping communities within this Synod to encourage their ministers, members, and active participants to contact their elected officials in support of the Raise the Age Wisconsin campaign; and

RESOLVED, that this Assembly directs the Synod Office, in conjunction with the Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Wisconsin and the Raise the Age Wisconsin campaign, to distribute materials to aid congregations in learning about and participating in the Raise the Age Wisconsin campaign and to regularly share communications about the campaign throughout the next year; and

RESOLVED, that this Assembly directs the Synod Office to share this resolution with the other ELCA synods in Wisconsin and directs the Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Wisconsin to share this resolution with its interfaith and secular partners, encouraging them to engage in similar actions; and

RESOLVED, that this Assembly requests that the Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Wisconsin provide an update on the Raise the Age Wisconsin campaign at the 2024 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly.

Submitted by the South Central Conference, January 19, 2023