

3 Easy Steps

Send a Support Letter for AB 1308 (for individuals)

AB 1308 is going to be voted on soon by the Senate Public Safety Committee, and it needs your support.

1. **Fill in the blanks!** Add in (1) the date, (2) your name, address, and email, and (3) information about yourself as indicated in red below, (4) add any other reasons you support AB 1308.
Erase all the red!
2. **Sign at the end of the letter.**
3. **Send by fax or email!**

Two choices:

Human Rights Watch will send the letter for you: Send us your letter, and we'll get it to the author, the committee chairperson, and also send copies to all members of the committee. You can send it to Human Rights Watch via fax (310-477-4622) or by email (send to rostamm@hrw.org with the subject line: "AB 1308 support letters.")

OR:

You can send the letter to the author yourself: Send the letter directly to the *by facsimile: (916) 319-2129* By email: rebecca.marcus@asm.ca.gov and find the fax number for each committee member online and fax to them as well.

****BEFORE YOU SEND, MAKE SURE TO ERASE ALL RED TYPE!****

[Date]

The Honorable Mark Stone
California State Assembly Member
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 3146
Sacramento, CA 95814

By facsimile: (916) 319-2129

By email: rebecca.marcus@asm.ca.gov

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 1308 (Stone)

Dear Assembly Member Stone:

I support Assembly Bill 1308 (AB 1308.) **[Say something about yourself, such as: “My wife and I run our own business in the San Fernando Valley.” Or: “I am a mother of four, and grandmother of three.” Or: “I am an attorney practicing in San Mateo, where I am active in the Democratic Party.” Or: “I am work at a nursery and am involved in my children’s school as a volunteer.” Or: “I am a survivor of violent crime and active in my community.”]**

[Then say something about why you support this bill, such as: “I want our laws to be just.” Or: “I think youth should get a second chance, and not spend the rest of their lives in prison.” Or: “I believe young people should be treated differently than fully mature adults in the criminal system.” Or: “I believe California should uphold human rights in its laws.”]

[If you’d like, please pick just one or two of the paragraphs below and erase the others. Remember that the more a letter is your own, and written in your voice, the more powerful it will be with the legislators. So, if you have time, please write why you support the bill in your own words, and delete as many of the paragraphs below as possible. Your letter can be short! One page is fine.]

I believe California should treat young people fairly, and recognize that young adults are neurologically and developmentally different from fully-matured adults. Our laws should reflect the fact that young people have tremendous potential to mature and change. Assembly Bill 1308 holds young adults who committed a crime at age 25 or younger responsible for their criminal behavior, but gives them a chance to turn their lives around. Assembly Bill 1308 is smart on crime and fiscally-wise for California. This bill would give young people the hope and motivation to change the direction of their lives and earn release that is based on rehabilitation.

Assembly Bill 1308 requires young adults to be accountable for their actions, but recognizes that young people have the capacity to learn and grow from their mistakes. Assembly Bill 1308 would require a young person who was 25 years old or younger at the time of a crime and sentenced to a long adult prison term serve a minimum of 15, 20, or 25 years in prison, depending on the seriousness of the crime. This is a substantial amount of time for any young adult. Then, at a parole board hearing, commissioners would consider the age of the person at the time of the crime and his or her subsequent growth, maturity, and rehabilitation. There would be no guarantee of parole, just a chance to be treated fairly and an opportunity to prove oneself. Existing checks and balances in parole law, such as review by the governor in many cases, and high standards for release that require a finding about future dangerousness, would remain in place, making the process a careful and cautious review. This model already exists in California law as Youth Offender Parole, and is being used with success with people who were 22 or younger at the time of their crimes and sentenced to adult prison terms. The rate of parole grants is

not high, and the recidivism rate is extremely low. Assembly Bill 1308 would expand to age 25 the existing Youth Offender Parole process.

Our laws should reflect scientific findings. Neurological research concludes that the human brain is not fully formed until early adulthood, and that young people do not have adult levels of judgment, impulse control, or ability to foresee the consequences of their actions. Through the mid-twenties, young people continue to develop into fully-mature adults. The vast majority outgrow the immaturity and behavior that leads to crime and choose a different path in life. Assembly Bill 1308 would allow a decision about the possibility of release after an individual has been incarcerated for many years and has proven by his or her actions whether parole is merited.

California already recognizes in several arenas the need to protect and provide special opportunities to young adults. Among other things, state law extends foster care services to age 21; sets Division of Juvenile Justice jurisdiction at age 23; and provides special opportunities for young adults in prison up to age 25. California recently raised to age 21 the age at which one can buy cigarettes, the same age required to use alcohol. Our laws recognize that young people are not mature enough for these responsibilities. These laws are based in part on scientific evidence concluding that certain areas of the brain, particularly those that affect judgment and decision-making, do not fully develop until the mid-20's.

Punishment must reflect the capacity of young people to change and mature, and it should promote rehabilitation. Youth who commit crimes should be held accountable. However, when California condemns a young person to a life behind bars, it disregards the human capacity for rehabilitation, the enhanced ability of young people to grow and change, and the very real physical and psychological differences between younger people and mature adults. Assembly Bill 1308 ensures that youth will face severe punishment for their crimes, but it also gives them hope and the chance to work toward the possibility of parole.

For many years, California has sought to address prison overcrowding and reduce unnecessary expenditures on incarceration. The state should focus our resources where they are most needed and choose pathways to reducing incarceration that emphasize rehabilitation. Under AB 1308, only eligible individuals who prove to the parole board, and Governor where applicable, that they have successfully rehabilitated and do not pose a risk of danger to society could be released. California could stop spending money to incarcerate these individuals who have been rehabilitated, and instead let them reintegrate into society to become productive contributing citizens. By focusing our resources on the cases that are a continuing threat to public safety, passage of AB 1308 would save millions of state dollars.

The fact that young adults are still developing means they have an especially strong capacity to grow and change. The prospect of a meaningful chance to earn parole creates hope in young people and gives them strong motivation to immediately choose a path of self-improvement in prison. These common-sense provisions strengthen public safety. For these reasons, I support AB 1308 and urge the legislature to pass this important bill.

Sincerely,

[Print your name]

cc: *Human Rights Watch, Fax: 310.477.4622*
Assembly Member Reginald Jones-Sawyer Sr. (Chair)
Assembly Member Tom Lackey (Vice Chair)
Assembly Member Heath Flora
Assembly Member Lorena S. Gonzalez Fletcher
Assembly Member Bill Quirk
Assembly Member Blanca E. Rubio
Assembly Member Miguel Santiago