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**Statement on Signing of Legislation to Raise the Lower Age**

Today, Governor Hochul signed into law historic legislation to end the arrest and prosecution of children under twelve and keep our youngest children out of the justice system. The signing of this bill marks another step in the right direction to meaningfully change the lives of young people and families across the state. S4051A/A4982 will raise the minimum age of juvenile delinquency jurisdiction from seven to twelve years old and require that young people receive support services and help from differential response programs to prevent future interactions with the justice system.

From violent arrests by law enforcement to the use of physical restraints and mentally and physically taxing interrogations, the criminalization of young – disproportionately Black and brown – children perpetuates racial disparities in the justice system and cycles of youth incarceration that many can never recover from. Young children who fall into the juvenile system at an early age are subjected to trauma and harm that follows them into their adult lives and puts them at increased risk for continued justice involvement. Raising the minimum age of entry into the juvenile justice system will reduce the number of children who come in contact with the system in the first place and ensure our young people have meaningful pathways to rehabilitation.

I applaud Governor Hochul for signing this necessary legislation to protect our young people. I would like to thank Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi for championing this legislation in the Assembly, as well as the Children's Defense Fund, The Legal Aid Society, Families Together in New York State, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, and all of the advocates who fought for the passage of this bill. I also want to extend my gratitude to the great Velmanette Montgomery for trusting us with her legacy in carrying on this important reform.

