

MEMORANDUM

To: All Members of the House of Representatives

From: Representative Harold James

Date: June 28, 2012

Subject: **Abolish Life Without Parole for Juveniles**

In the near future, I will be introducing legislation that will amend Title 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to grant juvenile offenders serving life sentences the possibility of parole after serving 25 years in prison.

The global rejection of life without parole for young offenders is overwhelming. According to the Human Rights Watch, the United States is the only country in the world that sentences youth to life without the possibility of parole for offenses they committed before the age of 18. The highest number of juveniles serving life sentences in the country is in Pennsylvania which currently has 373 (68 percent of which are African-American).

The U.S. Supreme Court decided in 2010 that juveniles serving life sentences without the possibility of parole for non-homicide crimes is considered to be a violation of the Eight Amendment's Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause. Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court recently decided that legislatively-mandated life without parole sentences for juveniles is unconstitutional and that judges should have the option of granting the possibility of parole. My legislation will allow every juvenile offender the possibility of parole after serving 25 years of his or her sentence.

If you would like to co-sponsor this important legislation, please contact Debbie Wegert in my Harrisburg office at 717-773-1792 or at DWegert@pahouse.net.