



The **CAMPAIGN** for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of **YOUTH**

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NEW MEXICO ABOLISHES LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE SENTENCES FOR CHILDREN

The bill will grant parole eligibility to those New Mexicans who were handed extreme sentences under the age of 18

March 22, 2023, Washington, DC — Banning life-without-parole sentences for children in New Mexico last week, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed the No Life Sentences for Juveniles Act ([SB 64](#)) on Friday, March 17, 2023. This law makes New Mexico the [27th state \(plus Washington DC\)](#) to end the use of these sentences for people younger than 18.

This is the latest in a national trend to reject the practice of sentencing children to die in prison. In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court established in *Miller v. Alabama* that sentencing a child to life without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional in all but the rarest of circumstances. At the time of that decision, only three states banned this practice. In the last decade, the number of states has increased ninefold.

This law will affect at least 75 individuals as it ensures that all individuals sent to prison for serious crimes committed when they were under 18 years old will be eligible for parole hearings 15 to 25 years into their sentences, depending on the conviction.

Before reaching the Governor, the legislation passed the state's House of Representatives and received bipartisan support in the Senate. The final language of the bill was the result of negotiations with a number of stakeholders, including the New Mexico District Attorney's Association. These negotiated amendments provided a pathway for this proposed reform to become law. "This bill is a result of a lot of compromises, a lot of conversations between victims, victim advocates, the ACLU, defense attorneys, and all sides of this. I believe that this compromise bill really reflects where the science is on the teenage brain and I would urge you to pass this," testified the First Judicial District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwhies in her individual capacity at [a committee hearing](#).

Successful negotiations also resulted in former opposition lending their support for the reform. Sen. Ron Griggs (R-Alamogordo) opposed the bill in 2022 but was one of the Republican

Senators who voted for it this session. “Any of us standing here today, we’re all probably lucky that when we were kids, we didn’t do something that put us in a bad spot,” Griggs [said](#).

Other supporters of this reform include longtime advocates from the [NM Coalition for the Fair Sentencing of Youth](#), [ACLU New Mexico](#), [FAMM](#), [Bold Futures New Mexico](#), [Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM](#), [Americans for Prosperity](#), [Southwest Organizing Project](#), and [Sister Helen Prejean](#).

Co-Sponsor and State Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez celebrated the bill becoming law, affirming that “incarcerated individuals who made horrible mistakes as children are deserving of hope and the possibility of redemption.” Denali Wilson, a staff attorney at the ACLU-NM and the lead advocate for the bill added, “we are overjoyed that New Mexico has made this important choice to believe in redemption. So many of the people impacted by this bill have already been in prison for decades, many for longer than I have been alive. For them, today marks the first day of hope.”

The ACLU and CFSY are partnering to ensure those impacted by the law will have legal representation for their parole hearings. “We have partnered with advocates in New Mexico for many years, seeking the meaningful reform that Gov. Lujan Grisham signed into law last week,” says Xavier McElrath-Bey, Co-Executive Director of the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. “Many people serving extreme sentences as children will now have a chance to show the parole board and, hopefully, the world who they've become. We have had the great honor of witnessing many of the 950 former life-sentenced children become mentors and change-makers in their communities and do other positive things to live out their eternal apology for the harm they once caused. To them, a second chance doesn't mean freedom from responsibility; it means finally being able to contribute to the much-needed healing in their communities.”

For more information, or if you would like to arrange an interview, please contact Adam Kemerer at akemerer@cfsy.org | 412-728-2340

[The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth](#) is a nonprofit that leads efforts to ban life-without-parole and other extreme sentences for children, and supports those incarcerated as children who are released after serving long sentences to lead and thrive.