



For Immediate Release

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Vermont Governor, Legislators Should Invest in Emerging Adults Rather than Backing Away from Raising the Age

Columbia Justice Lab issues a statement on Vermont Governor Phil Scott's recent retreat from groundbreaking youth justice reforms

NEW YORK, N.Y. — Last Thursday, Vermont Governor Phil Scott expressed concern about the state's ability to deliver needed services to youth in the justice system — including housing and rehabilitative treatment — and [appeared to walk back](#) his support of raising the upper age of juvenile jurisdiction. This is disappointing and counterproductive. Governor Scott should be commended for signing into law the [historic 2018 legislation](#) that gradually raises the age that youth are automatically prosecuted in family court from 18 to 20, and he should now be supporting its [successful implementation](#).

Lael Chester, **Director of the Emerging Adult Justice Project at the Columbia University Justice Lab** issued the following statement in response to these recent developments:

“Governor Phil Scott’s leadership on the 2018 Raise the Age Act was exactly what Vermont residents need to improve youth outcomes and public safety. In order to build on this progress, the Governor’s administration should continue to use research and science to guide the state’s youth justice policies and implementation of the 2018 law.

It is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented obstacles to Vermont’s ability to provide services to youth involved in the justice system. But [research](#) shows that raising the age at which young people are automatically prosecuted as adults is effective and developmentally appropriate. Facing roadblocks during its implementation does not mean that Vermont legislators and Governor Scott should retreat from this legislation. These issues can and should be addressed, and the [2019 Implementation Report](#) — which we submitted to the state legislature — provides a roadmap for successful implementation. It’s time to invest in the raise the age plan, not discard it.”

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[The Justice Lab at Columbia University](#) seeks to foundationally reconceive justice policy through actionable research, community-centered policy development, and the sustained engagement of diverse constituencies. We envision a community-centered future for justice in which healing

and resiliency, rather than punishment and surveillance, are used to solve social problems often rooted in racial and economic inequity. Follow us on Twitter [@CUJusticeLab](https://twitter.com/CUJusticeLab)