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**Columbia Justice Lab Praises Historic Washington Supreme Court Ruling Requiring Judges Consider Youth Before Imposing Life Without Parole Sentence**

**NEW YORK, NY** — Washington state’s Supreme Court released a landmark decision yesterday overturning the sentences of life in prison without parole for young adults under the age of 21. The ruling mandates that courts consider the age of the young defendants and exercise the same discretion when sentencing 18, 19 or 20-year-olds to die in prison as they would a 17-year-old — calling them “essentially juveniles.”

Prior to the Court’s ruling, under Washington’s state law, people over the age of 18 convicted of aggravated first-degree murder were sentenced to automatic life in prison without the possibility of release. Lael E.H. Chester, Director of the Emerging Adult Justice Project at the Columbia University Justice Lab issued the following statement on this ruling:

“It is exciting to see the Supreme Court of the State of Washington recognize the growing body of research showing that youth transitioning to adulthood share many of the same characteristics as their younger peers and that their youthfulness is constitutionally significant. Transitioning to adulthood can be a challenging time for young people, as they’re developing cognitive skills and growing independence. It is important that judges take into account the young age and brain development of these emerging adults when deciding how they will spend the rest of their lives.”

“This decision follows innovations in the burgeoning field of emerging adult justice that have dramatically increased across the country in the last five years, including legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction which is also currently being considered in Washington. Other states ought to follow their lead in using brain science and developmental research when considering sentences for emerging adults”

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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)*