



FOR RELEASE January 31, 2022, at 11:00 am

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## **Philadelphia District Attorney's Office Announces Launch of Historic Emerging Adult Unit**

NEW YORK, NY – On January 31, 2022 Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner announced that his office will turn its Emerging Adult Initiative, which began operating in October 2020, into a permanent unit. Specially assigned prosecutors, paralegals, and a Victim Witness Coordinator will work together to review misdemeanor and certain felony cases involving 18-25-year-olds (to the 26th birthday), to determine their eligibility for prosecution tailored to their distinct developmental stage. This approach is rooted in a robust body of research indicating that developmentally appropriate justice system responses to emerging adults are likely to be more effective and increase public safety.

The creation of the Unit was inspired and guided by [research](#) finding that the process of maturation into adulthood takes place until at least a person's mid-20s. Emerging adults have been shown to share many attributes with their peers under age 18, including being remarkably malleable and responsive to positive interventions, and are similarly more harmed by isolation, separation, and other negative interventions. Young people whose cases go to the Emerging Adult Unit will therefore be connected to community providers to participate in a range of programming appropriate for their life stage including arts, literacy, and financial literacy skill building, in lieu of less effective and counterproductive responses traditionally used in the adult criminal legal system.

“The Philadelphia DA’s office is ahead of the curve and has become a national model,” says Vincent Schiraldi, Senior Fellow, Columbia Justice Lab and former Commissioner, New York City Department of Correction. “When the first juvenile court was established in 1899, the founders relied on the norms of the day, not science. Philadelphia is using the well-developed body of research now available. Not only will this Unit support better youth outcomes, it will support safer and healthier communities for all of us.”

The new Unit will be able to tailor its response to each emerging adult, their case, and the relevant circumstances, relying on service provision by community partners and utilizing a range of prosecutorial avenues. As noted above, the Unit’s staff includes a

Victim Witness Coordinator who will ensure that victims support emerging adults' justice system outcomes. In doing so, the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office's thoughtfully crafted new Emerging Adult Unit will support young people, victims, and the greater community.

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*Information on Columbia University Justice Lab's Emerging Adult Project can be found [here](#).*