



Legislation Summary:

An Act to promote the appropriate treatment of young children

Initial bill number: [S48](#) (Bill numbers will change as legislation proceeds.)

Sponsor: Sen. Linda Dorcena Forry

This bill raises the age of juvenile jurisdiction--the age at which a child can be classified a "delinquent child" and subject to juvenile court proceedings—from age seven to age twelve. Currently in Massachusetts, young children, aged 7 to 11, can be arrested, prosecuted, and locked up. Introducing a child at such a young age to the justice system can cause substantial harm and derail a young child's development. Non-juvenile justice, community-based interventions are far more effective and timely in holding young children accountable for their actions.

In 2013, Massachusetts raised the age below which one is considered a juvenile for court proceedings to 18. Several states have or are considering raising the delinquency age. Raising the age of juvenile delinquency is consistent with social science research regarding young children's limited ability to fully appreciate and participate in judicial proceedings, and consistent with national practice regarding the capacity of very young children to participate meaningfully as defendants in a trial.

League Position: The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that early intervention and prevention measures are effective in helping children reach their full potential. The League supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being, encourage the full development and ensure the safety of all children. *LWVUS Impact on Issues* p. 79