

You Are Required to Register: Juvenile Court Reaches into Adulthood

Far from the origins of the juvenile court in Illinois in 1899, today in Illinois youth adjudicated delinquent for a range of offenses are required to put themselves on a registry upon turning the age of 17. Two registries in particular create a great deal of harm, well beyond childhood: The Violence Against Youth Registry Act (VOYRA) and the Sex Offender Registry Act (SORA). Over the past 120 years, the courts have had varied approaches to children, always at the intersection of race, gender, disability, family structure, and age. As a result of long standing discrimination, the courts eventually moved away from a “discretion model” to a “due process” model under which children were treated similar to adults. And, children have not escaped the U.S. system of mass incarceration. Black children are most likely to end up on registries and thus, from 17 to 27, they encounter myriad greater burdens than other youth. The children forced to register have their information shared with employers, higher education, law enforcement and publically (on the state registry). In short, the juvenile justice system is punishing children long into their adulthood and creating undue burdens. In this presentation we will trace the historical developments that led to youth being placed on the registry. We will exam the difficulties the registries pose for young people and the work currently happening in Illinois to remove children from these registries.