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## Police chief: I support 'Second Chance Bill'

Todd Thomas, For Post-Crescent Media 2:41 p.m. CDT October 23, 2015



(Photo: File)

The “Second Chance Bill” is a step in the right direction for our criminal justice system and is something I support.

Outagamie County has been at the forefront with this issue and has already been treating 17-year-old offenders in a similar manner under a pilot program that the leaders hope to expand.

In 1996, many of us in law enforcement believed that the maturation of our youth, and the increased violent criminal activity we were seeing occurring at a younger age, necessitated lowering the age to 17. We felt that increased accountability would improve public safety and address the issues we were dealing with at the time. We can’t judge the decisions of the past on what we know now but we must constantly evaluate and evolve.

It is clear that returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile court system for minor nonviolent crimes would benefit the state in the same way we have seen it benefit Outagamie County.

As we continue the discussions on the evolution of the criminal justice system of the 21st century, we need to encourage state legislators to continue to be open to look at doing things to allow us to “police smarter.” One of these things is to allow us to use our limited resources on those issues that are affecting the safety of our communities.

Diverting young adults from the criminal justice system as long as possible, when appropriate, will help improve the chance that they will not become involved in a cycle of incarceration. It will help us respond more effectively to the mental health needs of young offenders that are sometimes missed in the adult system.

We know there are significant racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system. This is a move in the right direction to improve that by diverting and using those alternatives to incarceration that are more available in the juvenile justice system.

The goal is to have a more effective response to youth crime and improve the criminal justice system. The “Second Chance Bill” does this while also helping law enforcement to build trust and improve relationships with all of our community members.

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