

Dear Senators:

The Philippines is facing a historical decision regarding its millions of young children under the age of fifteen. Their future is in your rational decision that will save thousands of young innocent children twelve to fifteen years of age from jail.

They will be put on trial charged with criminal acts if you vote to lower the age of criminal liability. Please do not vote to lower the age. Instead, protect the children and uphold the present law.

The nation, child rights advocates and the parents of hundreds of millions of young children will remember you and your vote as the ones who turned the Senate in favor of children and did not act against their best interest. History will remember your vote as the vote that saved these children from jails. More than 300 civil society organizations have signed and published an open letter appealing to you not to lower the age. Majority of Filipinos said they are against lowering the age. The international community is against it.

They are just children and have no knowledge or culpability of what they will do. This is due to their lack of education and being exposed to the bad example of adults and influence by a corrupt society. You as honorable senators are called to protect children from harm and not to expose them to harm. Please do not vote to lower the age. Do not condemn the children to jails.

There are almost no decent government homes or *Bahay Pag-asa* for children in conflict with the law. The children are placed behind bars in cages without help or hope or education or proper food. This incarceration is illegal under all Philippine child protection laws and international law. But it happens now and everyday hundreds of children as young as ten years of age are jailed.


They languish in subhuman conditions, become sick and are abandoned behind bars for no crime. They are sexually abused by older youth in small, overcrowded cells. This is happening now, today. This is a serious violation of the human rights and dignity of children. We rescue as many as we can and they tell us of the abuse they suffer. Please allow them to testify, view the photos attached.

The vast majority of children are jailed for simple misdemeanors like breaking curfew, taking fruit in the market, sniffing glue to ease pain and because they are hungry. They are on the streets because their parents are beating them at home or sexually abusing them and they have to run away.

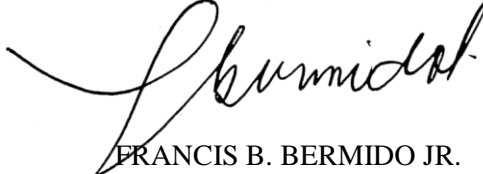
Your vote will be as historical and significant as the Senate voted to remove the US military bases in 1992. You have the swing votes to save the children. We hope you will make a stand, change history and protect the children by making an enlightened and rational vote by saying NO to lowering the minimum age of criminal liability of the little children.

On behalf of hundreds of civil society organizations and the majority of the Filipino people who said in a survey they do not approve the lowering of the age whereby their children can be put on trial and jailed, please vote No.

Sincerely,



FR. SHAY CULLEN
Founder and President



FRANCIS B. BERMIDO JR.
Executive Director