

TO:

The Honorable Mike Young, Chair of the Corrections and Criminal Law Committee and
Committee Members
Indiana State Senate
200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

RE: SB 368, Juvenile Justice (Sen. Tallian, author)

Date: 2/5/2021

First, I would like to thank each of you for your time and consideration in listening to the letters of support that you will receive today, on behalf of **SB 368**. My name is Brandon Randall and I have had the amazing honor to serve in various youth-serving capacities over the last thirteen years. The majority of my time has been committed to working and building with young people who have been involved in the Juvenile Justice system and their families. Over the years, I have spent tremendous amounts of time with some of the most amazing students who were charged with crimes that certainly did not mirror their leadership abilities, intelligence, or potential.

Since 2017, I have been employed via VOICES Corp, a youth-serving organization that focuses on relationship-building, healing-centered engagement, and leadership development. One of the components of our organization is the Day Reporting program. Students are referred to Day Reporting, primarily, from Juvenile Court as an alternative-to-detention and a method of supervision. Since the inception of the program, we have served close to 350 young people with a variety of charges, including possession of a handgun, robbery, theft, and drug-related charges. Now, the outside world may see a collective of “delinquents” who made poor decision in life and are now atoning for their actions. However, what we see is a group of young people, “at-promise”, who are empathetic, driven, and highly energetic. The perception of the outside world has placed labels on these youth who have made mistakes. In essence, what we see is the value of the authentic connections that we build with students as they matriculate through our programs. This process focuses on meeting students where they are without judgment, criticism, or negative reinforcement which is a paramount foundational principle of our organization. Individuals, institutions, organizations, and entities who serve the interest of young people will tell you that regardless of how structured and evidence-based your curriculum is, the measure of program effectiveness is the ability to re-build, maintain, and repair relationships. Those relationships, where the hearts of young people have been bruised and broken, are the only way to restore and replace the pain with love, positive affirmation, and truth; showing them how to live a healthy balanced life, regardless of their mistakes.

The vast majority of our students come to us with significant adverse childhood experiences and traumas, which lead to deeply layered distrust of systems, institutions, and the people who work in them. We work, diligently, to undo that harm and model what positive, caring, and consistent connections look like. In doing so, we strategically create opportunities for our students to advocate for themselves, work towards their own healing, and rediscover the power in their voice...as an individual, but more so as a collective. We have been blessed with a myriad of opportunities for our students to serve as participants in community-based discussion, and conferences. Our students have served as fellows with the Prosecutor’s Office, been featured guests at Public Policy summits, and co-facilitators at youth-centered forums.

Our students have demonstrated time and time again that if they are simply given the opportunity to show their potential, share their truth and be given access, they are capable of greatness. It is for this reason that I write this letter to you in support of **SB 368**; in particular, the emphasis of creating the process of automatic expungement of juvenile records. The students we serve at VOICES Corp and other systems-impacted students who participate in programs around the city, like ours, deserve the opportunity to have a clean slate upon their transition into adulthood.

What they have done in the past, as a still-developing adolescent, should not hover over them and create additional barriers to their success, hindering them from ultimately achieving their goals. As a community leader and youth advocate, I strongly encourage all committee members to vote in support of this bill, specifically the automatic expungement focus. This will allow young people, who have been held accountable for their decisions by the system, be able to have the opportunity at a fresh start as they reach for the stars.

Kind Regards,

Brandon Randall

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