



# CHIEF DEFENDERS ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK

**\*\*PRESS STATEMENT\*\***

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## RESPONSE TO ALBANY DA DAVID SOARES UNFOUNDED ATTACK ON RAISE THE AGE LEGISLATION

**ALBANY COUNTY, NY** – On Wednesday, Albany County DA David Soares bizarrely claimed the State should roll back the historic Raise the Age legislation because of a lack of investments for criminal legal system-involved youth. **In response, Mark Funk, President of the Chief Defenders Association of New York released the following statement:**

“CDANY refutes DA Soares’ baseless assertion that there is a correlation between the Raise the Age legislation and a recent alleged carjacking in Albany County. His fearmongering is not grounded in the data or the science. Indeed, New York was the last state in the nation to raise the age of criminal responsibility, only after the rest of the country proved that raising the age benefited youth, families, and community safety. The data is clear: treating kids like kids is most effective at preventing future recidivism and is the only humane and just approach. To now claim that Raise the Age created a "removal of penalties" that makes teens believe unlawful or violent acts have been "legalized" is a nonsensical misrepresentation of these reforms for calculated political gain. Enough. District Attorneys like Mr. Soares must stop trying to tear down these reforms. Instead, he should pitch in to help treat the root causes of violence which have nothing to do with raising the age and everything to do with increasing the investments in programs that can meaningfully impact system-involved youth. Youth need safe housing, access to quality education, job training, summer youth employment, and mentorship opportunities. It’s time to tell New Yorkers the truth: The safest communities have the most resources, not the highest jail populations.”

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## BACKGROUND

- Raise The Age legislation contributed to a massive reduction in arrests of children under 18. In NYC [between 2010 and 2020, arrests of children under the age of 18 dropped 86%, with the decrease accelerating following passage of RTA](#). Weapons arrests also decreased significantly over this period, dropping nearly 80%. Misdemeanors, meanwhile, decreased a massive 94%, including an 81% drop in the three years after RTA took effect (2017-2020). This decrease in arrests saved tens of thousands of teenagers the trauma of incarceration, as well as the harm caused by a criminal record, which can limit future educational, employment and housing opportunities. The decline in youth incarceration also made us safer by countering the “criminogenic” effects of detention—where jail and prison are so destabilizing that people are more, not less, likely to be rearrested in the future.
- Earlier this year, the [C.D.C issued a report on surging nation-wide gun deaths in the pandemic’s first year](#). Thomas R. Simon, associate director for science at the C.D.C.’s division of violence prevention notes that “stressors associated with the Covid pandemic...including changes and disruption to services and education, social isolation, housing instability and difficulty covering daily expenses” is one explanation for this nation-wide rise in gun violence.
- At the same time [a report by The Sentencing Project](#) found, after a review of the available data about youth violence during the pandemic, scarce evidence exists of a youth-led crime wave. Rather, most of the data suggest that youth violence has been flat or declining. The report notes that “a temporary rise in adolescent lawbreaking would not be surprising given the severe trauma and disruption young people have experienced during the pandemic. The pandemic has caused [a sharp increase in mental health problems among adolescents](#), including [sharp increases in anxiety disorders, depression, and self-harm](#). These pandemic-fueled problems cannot be solved with harsher punishments in the court system.”
- The safest communities are the ones with the most resources, not the highest jail populations. [Data](#) show that community-based, public health-centered violence intervention programs do a better job of preventing and decreasing gun crime than policing and prosecution.

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