

Media Contact: Brad White

National Youth Rights Association
4238B North Arlington Heights Road #211
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004-7931
Phone 847 420 5684 FAX 847 792 4060
Email bwhite@youthrights.org
Web www.youthrights.org



National Youth Rights Association
P.O. Box 5882 N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016

Press Release

Study says juveniles more competent than previously believed

Washington, D.C., March 5, 2003: Overturning commonly held beliefs, a recently released study, soon to be published in the journal *Law and Human Behavior*, shows that 16- to 17-year-olds and a majority of 11- to 15-year-olds demonstrate adult competency to stand trial.

This study clearly proves that large majorities of the studied youth are competent to stand trial, and this study applies to many cases that youth fight for, including lowering the drinking and voting age. The National Youth Rights Association (NYRA) believes the court should place all accused juveniles in adult court by default with the option to be ruled incompetent to stand trial in the same way for mentally ill adults. The defendant could use a juvenile's immaturity as a special defense, as with mental illness, but be the exception to the rule.

The study finds 2/3rd of 11- to 13-year-olds and 4/5^{ths} of 14- to 15-year-olds are competent to stand trial. Eighty percent of 11- to 13-year-olds, 87 percent of 14- to 15-year-olds and 93 percent of 16- to 17-year-olds, the same range as adults, demonstrated mature levels of understanding.

On reasoning, the study finds 14- to 17-year-olds did not differ from adults. On appreciation of consequences, 16- to 17-year-olds and young adults did not differ. In general, the magnitude of difference between the scores for 11- to 13-year-olds compared to adults was moderate by conventional statistical standards, yet the difference between the scores of 14- to 17-year-olds and adults was very small or did not differ.

The National Youth Rights Association, founded in 1998, is the largest youth rights organization. With principal offices in Washington, D.C., and Chicago, NYRA is growing rapidly. NYRA currently has twelve chapters with many more in the works. NYRA speaks at many conferences on youth rights and frequently appears on CNN and other major radio and television news networks. More information is available on NYRA at: www.youthrights.org

Juvenile Competency to Stand Trial Study available at: <http://www.youthrights.org/juvcomp.pdf>

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