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Letters: We must stop throwing away children's lives

Juvenile life without parole is inhumane, costly, and ineffective ("Throwing away the key," Tuesday). With 444 people serving life for crimes committed before they were 18, Pennsylvania accounts for nearly 20 percent of the 2,484 juvenile lifers in the United States. These youths are serving life sentences for crimes committed before they could legally be married, smoke cigarettes, or buy a lottery ticket.

Youths with histories of child abuse and neglect are grossly overrepresented among juvenile lifers. This population has a particularly high rate of mental-health issues, and these children are at higher risk of being raped, murdered, or assaulted while in prison.

Research tells us that youths have the capacity to change. Rather than throw these children away and deny them a chance at life, we should provide them with the tools necessary to better themselves and, if earned, the opportunity for parole.

Alyssa Goodin

Children's systems advocate

Mental Health Association

of Southeastern Pennsylvania

Philadelphia

agoodin@mhasp.org

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