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Human Rights for Kids Urges Congress to Protect Bipartisan Progress on Child Justice Reform

Washington, DC – Human Rights for Kids (HRFK) expressed deep concern today over legislation advancing in the U.S. House of Representatives that would roll back important bipartisan reforms to the treatment of children in the justice system.

On **September 10, 2025**, the House Oversight Committee approved **H.R. 5242**, which would:

- Reimpose mandatory life without parole sentences on children, effectively ensuring that some will spend the rest of their lives in prison without an opportunity for review.
- Eliminate meaningful sentence reviews, closing the door on second chances for young people who demonstrate growth and rehabilitation.

The bill now awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives.

In addition, **H.R. 4922/S.2686, Section 2(b)** would further restrict judicial discretion by prohibiting judges from considering a child's history of trauma, abuse, and victimization at sentencing.

"Both Republican- and Democratic-led states have recognized that children are different from adults, and that their histories of abuse, neglect, and trauma must be taken into account in the justice system," said James Dold, CEO of Human Rights for Kids. "Returning to mandatory life sentences for kids would disregard that bipartisan progress and the evidence we have about children's capacity for change."

A new national survey by Human Rights for Kids shows that children prosecuted as adults experience an average of **6.2 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**—including extremely high rates of abuse, neglect, parental separation, and family incarceration. Despite this, only **11%** of children reported that a judge considered their trauma at sentencing.

"Children who have been abused, trafficked, or neglected need opportunities for healing and accountability, not life sentences without hope," Dold added. "We urge Congress to preserve the bipartisan reforms that have already proven effective in states across the country."