I am deeply concerned about the ongoing efforts in Congress to lower the minimum age of criminal liability in the Philippines which is below 15 years of age. The proposed lowering vary from 9 and 12 years, and goes against the rights of child. There is a lack of evidence and data that children are responsible for the increase number of crime rates committed in the Philippines. Lowering the age of criminal liability will not prevent adult offenders from abusing children to commit crimes.

The Philippine governments must make sure that children grow up in a safe environment protected from crime and violence. Sadly, lowering the age of criminal liability is an act of violence against children. Children are already victims of circumstances, mostly because of poverty and exploitation by adult and crime syndicates. Children who are exploited and forced by adults to commit crimes need to be protected, not further penalized. Instead they should be given a second chance to change and to educate.

Scientific studies show that brain function reaches maturity only at around 16 years old, affecting children’s reasoning and logical thinking. Proposals to lower the age of criminal liability argue that children as young as 9 years old are criminally mature and are already capable of judgment. If this was the case, then why is the legal age to get married, employed, apply for driver’s license in the Philippines is at 18 years old? A 9-year old child has not yet even reached the age of puberty and their brains are not developed to understand the consequences of their actions.
The current proposal is to delay sentence up to a maximum age of 25 years. If a child is jailed at 9 years old it means that they may have to waste away their life for 17 years under imprisonment. Detaining children will not teach them accountability for their actions. In order to maximize their potential to contribute to nation-building, children must grow up in a caring, nurturing, safe and protective environment. This requires strong parenting support programs and access to health, education and social services. The Departments of Education and Social Welfare and Development deserve full support of Congress, particularly on increasing life skills of adolescent learners; establishing responsible parenthood program. We call on the government and civil society to focus on strengthening the implementation of free educational program and uplifting lives of community.

Reference:
National Public Radio Inc., Congress.gov.ph