

Brain development in regards to sentencing

The law, legislators, love the word culpability. As in, how much blame, or guilt, actually resides on the offender of a crime? When someone does commit a crime, is it not safe to assume that they're a criminal and 100 percent at fault? When it comes to processing and convicting adults we make this assumption all too easily under today's laws. However, when it comes to the culpability of a minor, of a juvenile, there is a leniency to the law, and rightfully so, due to the acknowledged acknowledgment that their brains are still under development.

In North Carolina, Executive Order 208 is a prime example of this acknowledgment, and in this writer's opinion, one that should have been enacted much sooner. Executive Order 208 was implemented in coordination with the Just Sentencing Project that allows juveniles who'd been sentenced to lengthy terms to possibly have their sentence commuted. This order, along with laws in other states, is based on Scientific Studies that show, for a fact, that the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain which controls decision making, logical thinking, and reasoning, doesn't fully mature until around age 25.

For some reason, when it comes to fully applying this science to our legislation, we as a society continue to fall short. We've limited the relevancy of this science to strictly to a group of people who are younger than what society has arbitrarily deemed an adult. Yet in reality,

that same science just as easily applies to people between the ages of 18 to 25.

Let's not dispute when one becomes an adult. For the sake of this conversation let's consider this:

Why are we sentencing people, whose part of the brain controlling emotions and impulses has yet to fully develop - to life sentences and decades in prison?

As it pertains to sentencing, we should consider the culpability of this age range, before handing out time that doesn't encourage rehabilitation, or reward it when it happens. Please take the time to research this topic for yourself and you'll quickly learn that our Mental Health professionals and legislators need to do a better job of coordinating.