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Julie Ellen McConnell

University of Richmond, jmconne@richmond.edu

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Five Devastating Collateral Consequences of Juvenile Delinquency Adjudications You Should Know *Before* You Represent a Child

by Julie Ellen McConnell

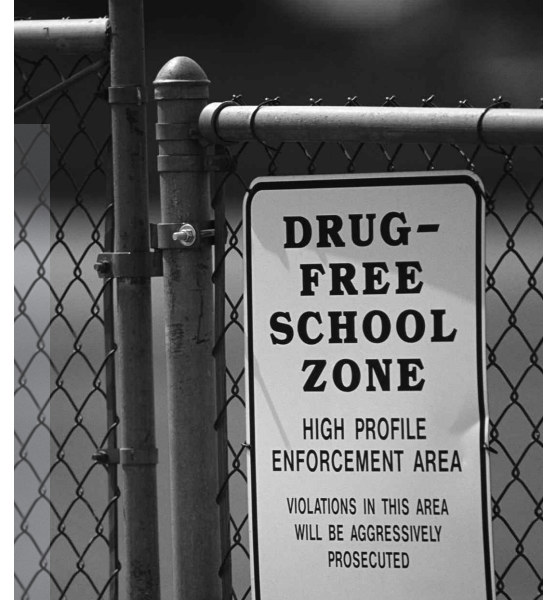


Julie Ellen McConnell is director of the Children's Defense Clinic and assistant clinical professor of law at the University of Richmond where she supervises second- and third-year law students in the representation of children charged with acts of delinquency and children who are in need of supervision, because of truancy or runaway status. She previously was supervising assistant commonwealth's attorney in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court for the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney's Office where she prosecuted cases involving juvenile delinquency, child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, and homicide. Before that she was an assistant public defender in the Richmond public defender's office.

The original purpose of the juvenile court was to create a forum, separate from the adult courts, in which children could be given the opportunity for rehabilitation and treatment.¹ Society placed an emphasis on correcting misbehavior and minimizing disruptions in the transition to adulthood for young people and wanted to spare them the stigma of being branded as "criminals."² In 1967, the Court established in *In re Gault* that juveniles, even though they were in a different system, were still entitled to the basic safeguards that an adult would be granted in the courtroom.³

For most of the existence of the juvenile court in Virginia, the belief that children are amenable to reform prevailed. Unfortunately, the late 1980s and 1990s ushered in a new attitude about how children should be treated in the criminal justice system. Based on a now disproven theory that there would be a wave of juvenile "superpredators" that would wreak havoc on our communities, public policy began to deemphasize youth privacy, treatment, and rehabilitation in favor of laws designed to heighten public accountability.⁴ In reality, the predicted youth crime wave never materialized and between 1999 and 2008, juvenile arrest rates for violent crimes decreased by 8.6 percent and total juvenile arrest rates have fallen by 15.7 percent in the past decade.⁵ Regardless, Congress and the Virginia General Assembly enacted numerous laws creating serious collateral consequences attendant to delinquency adjudications.

In *Padilla v. Kentucky*,⁶ the Supreme Court recently addressed the duty of counsel to advise clients about collateral consequences. In light of this case, the lifelong impact of many collateral consequences, and the inherent vulnerability of children,⁷ it is imperative that to provide effective



assistance of counsel, attorneys inform their clients of all the potential collateral consequences of a juvenile adjudication or conviction.⁸ Collateral consequences greatly impact the lives of individuals with criminal records, as well as, in many instances, the lives of their families.⁹ These consequences, both individually and collectively, constrict the social, economic, and political access of the two million juveniles arrested nationwide each year,¹⁰ impeding the individual's ability to reintegrate successfully into the community upon release. The collection of consequences that can attach to a single conviction is exceedingly difficult to grasp, as they comprise a mixture of federal and state statutory law, regulatory law, and local policies.¹¹

A Delinquency Charge Can Have Devastating Ripple Effects on a Child's Access to an Education.

In the 1990s, zero tolerance laws, spearheaded by the federal government in the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA),¹² mandated that states establish laws regarding firearms, require a one-year expulsion for certain weapons offenses, and provided incentives to states to tighten laws

involving weapons in schools. Whenever a child is charged with a delinquent act, even if it does not take place on school grounds, juvenile court intake officers are required by statute to notify the superintendent of the child's school district.¹³ Intake officers are further required to provide specific information about the nature of the offense and whether a petition is filed if it involves homicide, felonious assault, sexual assault, schedule I or II drug offenses, arson, burglary, robbery, or mob or gang activity.¹⁴ If a child is adjudicated delinquent of one of these offenses, the school superintendent may suspend or expel him or her.¹⁵ In some cases, including those involving weapons and drug offenses, if they occurred on school grounds, a school district must expel a child from school for not less than a year regardless of an adjudication of guilt under Virginia's zero tolerance policy.¹⁶

Many Juvenile Records Are No Longer Confidential

Youth and their families often believe that a juvenile record automatically disappears when the child turns 18, but juvenile records are no longer expunged for a child adjudicated delinquent of a felony.¹⁷ If a child is at least 14 when charged with a violent felony, the records will be open to the public.¹⁸ This lack of confidentiality can have devastating effects, including inhibiting future employment opportunities. Certain offenses are barrier crimes to providing care for children, the elderly, and the disabled, and serving in the military.¹⁹

In 1996, Congress passed a federal law that drastically broadened eviction policies governing low-income housing²⁰ requiring eviction for "[a]ny criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other tenants or drug-related criminal activity on or off such premises, engaged in by a public housing tenant, any member of the tenant's household, or any guest or other person under the tenant's control. . . ."²¹ This policy also rendered evicted family members ineligible for public housing for at least three years following the eviction.²²

Once an Adult, Always an Adult

In certain cases, children can be tried in circuit court as adults, rather than in juvenile court.²³ A young person 14 years or older can be transferred to circuit court in several ways: automatic certification after a preliminary hearing in juvenile and domestic relations court if the person is charged

with capital murder, 1st or 2nd degree murder, murder by lynching, or aggravated malicious wounding;²⁴ prosecutorial certification after proper notice and a preliminary hearing in juvenile court for serious felonies, such as robbery, rape, or a third possession with the intent to distribute narcotics;²⁵ and finally, by judicial discretion after a transfer hearing for all other felonies upon request by the commonwealth.²⁶

Once in circuit court, the youth will have the right to a jury trial, but will still be sentenced by the judge, who will have the option of employing the sentencing options of the juvenile court, with one exception.²⁷ Although the court will have the discretion to impose a sentence that combines a commitment to the Department of Juvenile Justice with time in the Department of Corrections,²⁸ the court will be required to sentence the young person to the Department of Corrections for any mandatory sentences required by statute.²⁹ The court is hamstrung by the absence of authority by which it can impose a mandatory minimum sentence to be served in the Department of Juvenile Justice, because the very nature of that system is that the length of stay is based on the youth's progress in the rehabilitative programs offered in juvenile facilities. Even in the case of serious offender commitments, the young person has a statutory right to a review after the first two years and could be released if a court felt the child had been rehabilitated.³⁰ It is important to note, however, that any time a child spends in detention or jail can be counted toward a sentence in the Department of Corrections if counsel petitions the department to include the time in the length of stay calculation.³¹ And finally, once a young person has been tried in circuit court, he will for-

...juvenile records are no longer expunged for a child adjudicated delinquent of a felony.

ever be considered an adult and in future cases will proceed directly to circuit court, and in the case of a jury trial, will be sentenced by the jury.³²


Juvenile Adjudications Can Trigger Enhancements in Sentencing for Later Convictions

In some cases, juvenile adjudications can enhance sentencing for subsequent convictions.³³ A juvenile 14 years or older who has been adjudicated



delinquent of an offense that would be a violent felony if committed by an adult may be committed as a “serious offender” to a juvenile correctional center for a determinate sentence of anywhere from one year to up to the age of 21, but not to exceed seven years.³⁴

Virginia’s discretionary sentencing guidelines include prior juvenile convictions and adjudications of delinquency,³⁵ so a prior juvenile burglary adjudication, for example, would make a defendant a Category II offender on the Virginia Sentencing Guidelines, thus enhancing his



Adolescents, more than adults, tend to discount the future and to afford greater weight to the short-term consequences of decisions.”

sentencing range significantly. And some prior juvenile adjudications for sexual offenses will trigger a maximum penalty for future sex offenses³⁶ and can be considered as evidence in determining eligibility under the Sexually Violent Predator’s Act.³⁷

Additionally, in Virginia, it is generally unlawful for any person under the age of 29 who was adjudicated delinquent as a juvenile 14 years or older, for an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult, to possess a firearm.³⁸ And the minimum mandatory punishments under Virginia’s “firearm felon”³⁹ statute apply to any person adjudicated delinquent when 14 or older for murder, kidnapping, robbery with a firearm, or rape and to any person under 29 who was adjudicated delinquent as a juvenile 14 years or older, for an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult.⁴⁰

Delinquency Adjudications Can Dramatically Increase Sentencing Calculations under Federal Guidelines

The federal guidelines require the computation of a convicted defendant’s Criminal History Category (CHC). This category establishes one axis of the sentencing guidelines matrix. The higher the CHC, the higher the guideline sentence recommendation. Section 4A. 1.2 of the guidelines sets forth the number of points to be included in calculating the category; and it does so by assigning points based upon sentences previously served, including for juvenile adjudications.⁴¹

The sentencing guidelines require that two points be added for each juvenile sentence to confinement of at least sixty days and that one point be added for other juvenile sentences within five years of the current offense.⁴² This may include simply a commitment to a juvenile detention home.⁴³ If the defendant received a sentence of imprisonment exceeding one year and one month, three points are added for each sentence.⁴⁴

A delinquency adjudication is not a conviction for immigration purposes,⁴⁵ but a delinquency adjudication still can create problems for juvenile immigrants. Certain grounds of inadmissibility (bars to obtaining legal status) and deportability (loss of current legal status) do not depend upon conviction; mere “bad acts” or status can trigger the penalty.⁴⁶

Conclusion

It is imperative that lawyers representing children understand the myriad collateral consequences of a young person’s encounters with the law and properly inform their clients about them. “Adolescents, more than adults, tend to discount the future and to afford greater weight to the short-term consequences of decisions.”⁴⁷ Lawyers have a duty to be well informed as to all of the consequences a youth might face in order to properly advise their clients.⁴⁸ We must anticipate these consequences and fully consider and plan for them wherever possible.⁴⁹

Endnotes:

- 1 *Smith v. Daily Mail*, 443 U.S. 97, 107 (1979) (Justice Rehnquist expressing his concern over piercing this traditional veil of confidentiality).
- 2 Franklin E. Zimring, “American Juvenile Justice” (2005) (noting that Jane Addams, one of the original visionaries of the juvenile justice system, said that the goal of the system was “a determination to understand the growing child and a sincere effort to find ways for securing his orderly development in normal society.”)
- 3 *In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 1428 (1967) (concluding that juveniles were protected by the constitutional right to counsel, the opportunity to confront witnesses, the right against self-incrimination, the right to a transcript of the hearing, and a right to appeal the court’s decision).
- 4 Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, “Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report, National Center for Juvenile Justice” (NCJJ) (describing “superpredator” myth created by John DiIulio to call public attention to what he characterized as a “new breed” of offenders). See “Body Count: Moral Poverty...And How to Win

- America’s War Against Crime and Drugs” William J. Bennett, John J. DiIulio , and John P. Walters, (“[K]ids that have absolutely no respect for human life and no sense of the future. . . . These are stone-cold predators!” He has described these young people as “fatherless, Godless, and jobless” and as “radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more teenage boys, who murder, assault, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs, and create serious [linked] disorder.” P. 27.
- 5 U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in The United States 2008: Ten Year Arrest Trends, Table 32, available at http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2008/data/table_32.html (last viewed May 10, 2011).
- 6 *Padilla v. United States*, 130 S. Ct. 1473 (2010). (ruling in an ineffective assistance claim that criminal defense attorneys must warn their clients of a potential deportation if they plead guilty and are not U.S. citizens.)
- 7 *Roper v. Evans*, 543 U.S. 551, 569 (2005) (stating juveniles are more vulnerable or susceptible to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer pressure. . . “[a] lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility are found in youth more often than in adults and are more understandable among the young. These qualities often result in impetuous and ill-considered actions and decisions”).
- 8 U.S. Const. Amend. VI.
- 9 Christopher Mele & Teresa A. Miller, “Collateral Penalties as Techniques of Social Policy, in *Civil Penalties, Social Consequences 10*” (2005) (relating that collateral consequences “reach far beyond individuals who have come into direct contact with the criminal justice system to include their families and communities”).
- 10 Charles Puzanchera, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, *Juvenile Arrests 2008* (2009).
- 11 See, e.g., Gabriel J. Chin, “Race, the War on Drugs, and the Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction,” 6 J. Gender Race & Just. 253, 259 (2002) (explaining the difficulties of grasping the range of consequences that attach to a particular offense).
- 12 20 U.S.C. Chapter 70, § 8924.
- 13 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-260(G) (2011).
- 14 *Id.*
- 15 Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-277 (2011).
- 16 Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-277.07 and Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-277.08.
- 17 Va. Code Ann. 16.1-299 (2011).
- 18 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-305 (2011).
- 19 Va. Code Ann. § 19.2-392.02 (2011); Va. Code Ann. § 63.2-1719 (2011); Va. Code Ann. § 63.2-1726 (2011). All branches of the military require adjudications, whether traffic related or more serious, be reported and waivers must be granted before recruits are allowed to serve.
- 20 National Affordable Housing Act, Pub. L. No. 104-120, § 9(a)(2), 110 Stat. 836 (1996).
- 21 *Id.*
- 22 In 2002, the issue went to the Supreme Court in *Department of Housing and Urban Development v. Rucker*, 535 U.S. 125 (2002)(affirming that residents could lawfully be evicted from public housing based on the offenses of their relatives).
- 23 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1 (2011).
- 24 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1(B) (2011).
- 25 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1(C) (2011).
- 26 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1 (A)(2011).
- 27 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-272(A) (2011).
- 28 A “violent juvenile felony” is defined as any offense that is subject to certification to the adult court pursuant to Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1(B) or (C) (2011). The statute reads that, under this provision, a juvenile may “serve a portion of the sentence as a serious juvenile offender . . . and the remainder of such sentence in the same manner as provided for adults”; (ii) “. . . serve the entire sentence in the same manner as provided for adults”; or (iii) a suspended adult term “conditioned upon successful completion of such terms and conditions as may be imposed in a juvenile court upon disposition of a delinquency case. . . .” [see Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-272(A)(1) (2011)].
- 29 See *Commonwealth v. Brown*, 279 VA. 210, 688 S.E.2d 185 (2011) (holding the mandatory minimum sentencing provisions of Va. Code § 18.2-53.1 control over the juvenile sentencing options contained in subdivision A 1 of § 16.1-272 that allow suspension of an adult sentence).
- 30 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-285.1(F) (2011).
- 31 Va. Code Ann. § 53.1-187(2011).
- 32 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.1(c)(2011). See also *Hughes v. Commonwealth*, 39 Va. App. 448, 573 S.E.2d 324 (2002) (concluding that defendant juvenile, tried as an adult and convicted of lesser-included offense of unlawful wounding, could not have his case transferred back to the juvenile court, as once juvenile court made a probable cause finding it had no further jurisdiction); *Saunders v. Commonwealth*, 281 Va. 448, 706 S.E.2d 350 (2011) (concluding when defendant appeared before a circuit court for sentencing on criminal charges under Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-269.6, the jury was correctly allowed to sentence defendant because he was not a juvenile in that he had been previously convicted as an adult on an unrelated charge and given an adult sentence).
- 33 VA Code Ann. 17.1-805(2011). Virginia Code states that, “previous convictions shall include prior . . . juvenile adjudications of delinquency based on an offense which would have been at the time of conviction, a felony, if committed by an adult. . . .”
- 34 Va. Code Ann. § 16.1-285.1(2011) Also, Children on parole for a prior commitment for a delinquency which would have been a felony if com-

- mitted by an adult or those with a felony adjudication from the previous twelve months are eligible for a serious offender commitment for any felony adjudication.
- 35 Va. Code Ann. § 19.2-295.1 (2011).
- 36 Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-67.5:3 (2011). *See also* Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-67.5(2) (2011).
- 37 *See Commonwealth v. Garrett*, 276 Va. 590, 667 S.E.2d 739 (2008) (concluding that an expert may testify about the defendant’s propensity to commit further acts of a sexually violent nature based on analysis of juvenile and adult records).
- 38 Va. Code Ann. § 18.2-308.2(A) (2011).
- 39 *Id.*
- 40 *Id.*
- 41 United States Sentencing Guidelines § 4A. 1.1 *See also United States v. Kirby*, 893 F.2d 867 (6th Cir. 1990)(holding that the federal court determination is not effected by whether a juvenile adjudication is considered a “conviction of crime.”).
- 42 United States Sentencing Guidelines § 4A. 1.2(d)(2).
- 43 *See United States v. Williams*, 891 F.2d 212 (9th Cir. 1989).
- 44 United States Sentencing Guidelines § 4A. 1.2(d)(1).
- 45 *See Matter of Devision*, 22 I&N Dec. 1362 (BIA 2000); *Matter of Ramirez-Rivero*, 18 I&N Dec. 135 (BIA 1981).
- 46 8 U.S. Chapter § 1182(a).
- 47 Kim Taylor-Thompson, “States of Mind/States of Development,” 14 STAN. L. & POLY REV. 143, 154 (2003).
- 48 Kristin Henning, “Eroding Confidentiality in Delinquency Proceedings: Should Schools and Public Housing Authorities Be Notified?” 79 N.Y.U. L. REV. 520 (2004); Elizabeth Scott & Thomas Grisso, “The Evolution of Adolescence: A Developmental Perspective on Juvenile Justice Reform,” 88 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 137 (1997).
- 49 Robert E. Shepherd, “Pleading Guilty in Delinquency Cases”, 16 *Criminal Justice Magazine* (2001).

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