September 13, 2013

His Excellency Deval L. Patrick
Governor
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

Re: House Bill No. 1432, An Act Expanding Juvenile Jurisdiction

Dear Governor Patrick:

I write on behalf of the Massachusetts Bar Association in strong support of House Bill No. 1432 which would raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from age 17 to 18.

Currently, 17 year olds arrested for crimes are treated as adults regardless of the crime or the circumstances surrounding the arrest. The treatment of 17 year olds as adults, means they are incarcerated with adults and even if not convicted they will carry around the stigma of an adult record for the rest of their lives. When a 17 year old is arrested for a crime there is no requirement for parental notification, they can waive their Miranda rights and can agree to a subsequent plea bargain without parental advice.

Myriad studies have shown that a 17 year old sentenced in the adult criminal justice system is: more likely to reoffend, at greater risk of being abused while incarcerated and, at greater risk for suicide.

The best place for 17 year olds in the criminal justice system is in the juvenile courts where judges, juvenile probation officers and others within the juvenile justice system are far better equipped to deal with 17 year olds by placing them in a more effective rehabilitative setting.

Very truly yours,

Martin W. Healy
Chief Legal Counsel and
Chief Operating Officer