

March 24, 2019

TO THE MISSISSIPPI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

GOVERNOR'S VETO MESSAGE FOR HOUSE BILL 666:

I am returning House Bill 666: "AN ACT TO AMEND SECTION 43-21-605, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, TO RAISE THE MINIMUM AGE AT WHICH A CHILD MAY BE COMMITTED TO THE STATE TRAINING SCHOOL; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES."

House Bill 666 amends Miss. Code Ann. Section 43-21-605 to increase the minimum age from ten to twelve for the commitment of youth offenders to the state training school and prohibits secured detention as the disposition of an offense committed by youth offenders under the age of twelve. I am vetoing House Bill 666 because it prevents Youth Court Judges from placing violent offenders ages ten and eleven in either the state training school or secured detention as the disposition of a violent crime.

While it is rare that youth ages ten and eleven commit violent crimes, it is not unprecedented, and in such circumstances placement in either the state training school or a secured detention facility may, as a last resort, be necessary to protect public safety. Existing Mississippi law is clear that commitment to the state training school or secured detention are options of last resort for all youth offenders. House Bill 666 unnecessarily restricts the discretion of Youth Court Judges when dealing with the most dangerous youth offenders. My veto is supported by the Mississippi Council of Youth Court Judges and the Mississippi Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit, a division of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety.

In the same spirit of the reasonable criminal justice reform measures presently being considered by the Legislature, I would support the proposed amendment to existing law if it contained an exception for violent crimes committed by youth offenders ages ten and eleven. Such an amendment was offered, but the amendment was defeated.

I encourage the Legislature to work with the Mississippi Council of Youth Court Judges to craft legislation that does not limit the discretion of Youth Court Judges when handling the most dangerous of youth offenders.

Therefore, I am vetoing House Bill 666.

Respectfully submitted,

PHIL BRYANT  
GOVERNOR