18-year-old offenders belong on the juvenile-justice system

By Rosabeth Moss Kanter

regardless of how people feel about the results of imprisonment or partial eleve-

tion. For example, in this vein — including a specialized court in Hampden

county and set-aside units in the Middlesex and Suffolk counties — courts

can absorb older populations; indeed, the juvenile justice system stops short of making a formal recom-

mendation for expansion. But by then, many have done enormous damage to their families, and the criminal-justice system — and with a much better chance to access the help and counseling that’s more readily avail-

able in the juvenile system. Those arguments persuaded the state Senate to vote to delay the change, making juvenile courts remain for at least two years after the law went into effect.

The first juvenile courts in this country sprang up more than a century ago, when Progressive-era reformers made the case that the criminal justice system should be reformed to recognize that young people are less culpable — and provide a unique class entitled to different treatment.

The compromise: a task force composed of lawmakers and stakeholders charged with examining how the system handles emerging adults in the adult justice system.

The report’s group, filed Thursday, makes a detailed case for the unique needs of this population — and the arguments for treating children not as smaller adults, but as a unique class entitled to different treatment.

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