

JUVENILE, from page 5

about Bullitt and his friends' arrest online, including their full names and mug shots.

Bullitt said he smiled, out of habit, for his mug shot, but police instructed him not to before taking the picture.

"Now for these kids moving forward," Singh said, "anyone can just Google search their names and that's going to be there, these stories about them. To me that's the most ridiculous part about it, this idea that we're treating kids as adults and then they get stigmatized the

same way as adults do with these convictions, not recognizing that kids do make mistakes, and that kids change and grow and become adults."

Nearly 70 testimonials submitted to the court in this case, obtained by Street Roots, painted a picture of four boys who came from caring and attentive families. These were kids who, the letter writers said, had talents and productive interests, but who had a terrible lapse in their teenage judgment.

The bulk of the letters were in support of Bullitt and Cabrera. According to their contents, Cabrera was a mentor to kids at Sunnyside Environmental School, where children were "visibly" distraught over news of his arrest. He was noticed by educators as a student who reached out to new or shy

students and went out of his way to help a classmate with Down syndrome.

The authors stated that given a second chance, there was reason to believe the boys could correct their behavior and that trying them as adults and locking them up for the

rest of their adolescence was not the best approach.

"When people were coming out of the woodwork to show their support, I knew it was serious," said Bullitt's mother, Melita. Before the incident, she wasn't aware of Measure 11, and was shocked her son was being tried as an adult for his first

offense.

"I knew it was unjust," she said. "I have not learned a good lesson throughout this. I have learned a hard lesson."

Bullitt was the teacher's assistant in his high school dance class, where he helped instruct beginners, before his arrest. He dances in many styles – contemporary, jazz, hip hop and ballet – and he often takes a lead role in choreographed school performances.

Grant High School administrators decided Bullitt could return to school with a safety plan before the district attorney decided he could return to society by offering him a plea deal. But he has missed more than a month of school and will no longer be allowed to be the dance teacher's TA, a decision his mother said disappointed him,

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For more on impact of Measure 11 charges on youths, see Andy Ko's commentary for Partnership for Safety and Justice, page 12.

but he's glad to finally be back in school following spring break.

He might dance professionally one day, but what he really wants to be is a veterinarian, he said, because he likes animals – hardly the sentiment of a hardened criminal, said his grandfather, Fred Nemo.

In a voluntary letter that he asked police to give to his victim, Bullitt concluded: "I apologize with all my heart, and I want to you know that I'm not just writing this letter to get out of trouble, but I actually want you to have a good time in high school without having to worry about bullies and thieves. I'm sorry."

While these traits and a letter of apology don't excuse Bullitt's behavior, his teachers and family believe he's demonstrated potential for being able to contribute to society in a positive way, but they feared that potential could be eroded with a felony record or long prison sentence, when juvenile court would have sufficed.

In 2013, a bill that would have required a hearing to see if the case should be waived back to juvenile court every time a prosecutor charged a minor as an adult died in committee.

"We have made various efforts to try to change Measure 11 in different ways and have not had any success," McKechnie said. "The No. 1 barrier to getting anything done has been Measure 10, which passed the same time."

Measure 10 amended the Oregon Constitution to require that any change to a voter-passed sentencing law must get a two-thirds majority in both the House and the Senate.

McKechnie's organization, along with Partnership for Safety and Justice, Oregon ACLU and others, has advocated for Oregon to stop automatically trying 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in Measure 11 cases and roll back some of the mandatory minimums that take away all power from judges to weigh an individual's history and circumstances when doling out a sentence.


"Until there's a clear level of support on both sides of the aisle, these issues aren't going to come up for a clear up or down vote. I think it would take more votes from the Republican side than there have been in the last few years to get it passed," he said.

Polling suggests, however, that the Oregon voters are favorable to making some changes to Measure 11, he said, and victims and law enforcement groups are split on whether it should change.

A ballot measure campaign, however, would require major funding because a lot of money will come from the opposition, he said, which historically has been Crime Victims United and Oregon District Attorneys Association.

This means that until changes are made to the law, youths will continue to be charged as adults in counties, such as Multnomah, where district attorneys commonly use Measure 11 in juvenile cases. If the trends of the past 30 years hold steady, it will continue to disproportionately affect kids of color.

emily@streetroots.org



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