

# May I

Mississippians for the Awareness of Youth Issues

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**Youth** - (adj.) An early period of development between childhood and maturity, **Minor** - (adj.) Not yet of legal age, **Juvenile** -(adj.) not fully developed, not yet adult or mature, typical of children, intended or suitable for children

Did you know that in Mississippi, Law Enforcement Officials can legally interrogate your child without you being present? Or without your knowledge? Did you know that a 13 year old can waive his Miranda rights? Current MS law states, " A person taking a child into custody shall also make continuing reasonable efforts to notify the child's parents, guardian or custodian and invite {them} to be present during any questioning." (Ms Law Code 43-21-303(3))

In January, 2007, Representative George Flagg, Chairman of the Juvenile Justice Committee and sponsor of House Bill 727, tried unsuccessfully to pass an amendment to change that law, stating, "During any interrogation of any child under 17 years of age, law enforcement officials must make continuing reasonable efforts to notify the child's parents, guardian or custodian. I ask, "reasonable effort?" How about, "Before any law enforcement official questions any child, 17 years of age or younger, it is MANDATORY that a parent, guardian, custodian or attorney be present?" Also in that amendment was allowing Circuit Court Judges discretion in appropriate sentences for Juveniles. (Some verdicts carry mandatory life sentences currently for adults and juveniles alike.)

One child advocacy group's motto is "A child is NEVER an adult." Having 5 children of my own (1 birth child, 4 adopted), I can totally agree with this statement. Years ago I made a point to watch a talk show featuring a famous psychologist speaking on "Raising Children." One statement was made so often, I wrote it on an index card and taped it in my kitchen so I could see it daily. It simply said, "Children cannot predict the consequences of their actions." This is so true! How many times a day does a child, any child, get corrected, in trouble, or punished for this very thing? Even the best of kids can find themselves in trouble. What if the punishment handed out was 3-year prison sentence or a life sentence without parole? Wouldn't you want to be present if a police officer was questioning YOUR child, no matter what the circumstances?

Since this has come to my attention I have done some 'surfing', questioning (parents, grandparents, law enforcement officials, legal guardians, clinical psychologists,) and writing representatives from all over the state. I need to do more. However, since this probably will not arise in the Legislature again until next January, I waste no time in preparing to let our Representatives and Senators know how I, as a parent, feel about this. What about you?

Depending on your level of surprise, shock, concern, or disbelief and the amount of SPARE TIME you have HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO:

