The National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter, strongly supports Senate Bill 308, also known as “Second Chance” legislation.

Jane Addams, the “mother” of the social work profession and the founder of the famous Settlement House called Hull House, knew instinctively in 1899 what we know from research today—that children are different than adults and should be treated as such when they commit non-violent crimes. In 1899 as a result of lobbying by Jane Addams and her Hull House colleagues the first juvenile court was established in the country. Within ten years similar laws were passed in 22 other states.

Jane Addams and the other Settlement House workers at Hull House knew at the turn of the century that children could be rehabilitated and made into productive citizens. They saw the damage that was done to children put into adult prisons and court.

Today over 100 years later we have research that shows that the portion of the child’s brain that relates to judgment is not fully formed until the mid-20’s. We also know, from a study conducted in Florida that 17 year olds who are referred to juvenile court are less likely to re-offend than 17 year olds referred to adult court.

The reasons for the different outcomes for 17 year olds referred to juvenile court versus adult court are clear. The juvenile system provides individual assessment and services and is specifically set up to reduce recidivism among youth. The adult prison system is not set up to understand adolescent development or provide the services needed by adolescents. Putting a youth in an adult prison also exposes the youth to adult offenders, to rape and other violence and trauma that decrease the chances that these youth will ever be able to successfully reintegrate in society. An adult “record” also provides a major barrier to employment and housing, which are key components to successfully reintegrating in society.

We urge you to support Senate Bill 308