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## Editorial

### Supreme Court ruling on juveniles is humane

**THE ISSUE: Court limits juvenile life sentences.**

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Florida's record was obviously at the heart of the Supreme Court's welcome ruling that juveniles cannot be sentenced to life in prison without parole if a murder wasn't committed.

The High Court decision affects 129 prisoners serving such terms nationwide, including 77 in Florida. Approximately 18 of the cases involved prisoners from Broward and Palm Beach counties, with all but one of those prisoners being black.

The ruling actually came in the case of Terrance Graham, who was sentenced to life without parole. While a Jacksonville teen, he was involved in armed robberies.

Despite the ruling, you don't have to be concerned that the streets are suddenly going to be filled with thugs who committed horrible crimes as teens. What the ruling does is allow those who were sent away for life as juveniles to have their cases reviewed in the coming years. Nobody automatically receives a get-out-of-jail card.

Most importantly, the ruling showed that the Supreme Court recognizes juveniles should at least be given a chance to show they have matured and been rehabilitated to the point where they might some day get their freedom. It is no guarantee, but it provides hope where there has been none — along with recognition that, over years, people can change. Too bad Florida needed the High Court to drive the point home.

This possible lifeline is sure to be controversial. In [Palm Beach County](#), for example, two of the four convicted in the heinous Dunbar Village rape case may not have to spend the rest of their lives behind bars. But there is nothing in the Court's decision that would make that so. It only provides the flexibility to review those cases, and others, in the future.

There will be those who won't be able to prove they are capable of re-entering society. There may be others, particularly in crimes that weren't as horrific, who might. The ruling simply means that those who were put away for life for armed robbery or carjacking may be able to show they have changed from when they were committing crimes as teens.

The decision is humane, in that it provides some impetus for teens convicted of serious crimes to better



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themselves while in prison, in hopes of some day having their case reviewed. And again, it provides a measure of hope.

This is not a matter of the conservative-leaning Supreme Court all of a sudden going soft on crime. It is simply an acknowledgement that in some cases — particularly with juvenile felons — there needs to be a chance for redemption.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Ruling is welcome, humane.

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