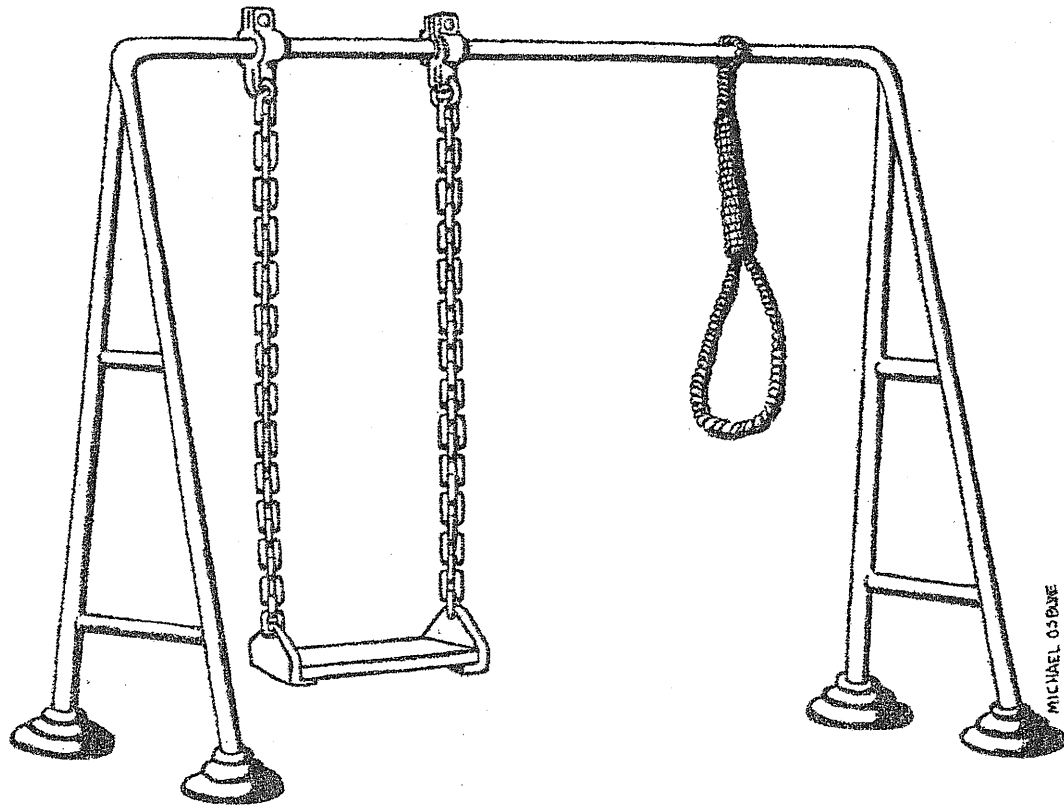


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Shouldn't throw away kids before they mature; not even Ashley Jones

Deputy District Attorney Laura Poston recently wrote a letter about the case of Ashley Jones, who was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for a crime committed when she was only 14 years old ("The News' characterization of girl's role in crimes grossly misleading to public," *The News*, Nov. 4). She was responding to an editorial condemning the practice of sentencing 13- and 14-year-old children to life in prison ("From puberty to the grave," *The News*, Oct. 22), which is the subject of a recent report by the Equal Justice Initiative.

Poston accused *The News* of "grossly misleading" the public for reporting Jones "helped her older boyfriend kill her grandfather and aunt," yet Poston's letter provides details of the crime that confirm the facts in the editorial. While Poston appears to relish the tragic details of the crime, she presented no legitimate argument about the veracity of the editorial. More important, Poston failed to disclose the fact Jones' family members — including her grandmother and sister, who are victims of the very crime luridly detailed in Poston's letter — want her to be paroled.

What's more disturbing, however, is Poston's claim that Jones grew up in a "safe and loving home." Ashley was raised by a crack-addicted mother and a physically abusive father. Her mother abandoned her in crack houses when she was a toddler. Ashley wit-

nessed brutal violence between her mother and father. The physical abuse Ashley experienced resulted in her being hospitalized after her father broke her hand.

When her mother remarried, her stepfather sexually abused her and was sent to prison. The desperate and violent circumstances of her upbringing led Ashley to attempt suicide twice by the age of 13. Tragically, there was nothing safe about Jones' home, which is what led to the state removing her and placing her with her grandparents.

Unfortunately, the judge couldn't consider these facts when she sentenced Ashley to death in prison because the sentence of death in prison was mandatory. I believe mandatory sentences are wrong. Some people may agree that throwing away children before they have a chance to mature and develop is appropriate. I believe something more hopeful about children, even abused kids like Ashley Jones.

The surviving victims of Jones' crime recognize the positive changes Jones, now 22, has made in her life and believe she should have an opportunity to demonstrate those changes to the parole board. *The News* was right to agree with them.

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