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## U.S. Supreme Court Ruling Affects Juveniles Sentenced in Florida

Last week was an eventful one for the United States Supreme Court. The justices tackled immigration, healthcare and declined to revisit its ruling in *Citizens United*. In addition, the Court resolved some significant issues related to mandatory sentences for juveniles.

The Supreme Court issued decisions in two cases: *Miller v. Alabama* and *Jackson v. Arkansas*. In each, the Court held that states may not institute mandatory life sentences without the chance of parole for [juveniles](#). The cases both involved 14-year-olds who were sentenced to life without parole following homicides. One of the youths had participated in a robbery and was standing as a lookout outside of the store when another individual killed the clerk inside.

The high court reasoned that imposing such strict sentences amounts to a violation of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. Justice Elena Kagan, who penned the majority opinion, wrote, "Mandatory life without parole for a juvenile precludes consideration of his chronological age and its hallmark features - among them, immaturity, impetuosity, and failure to appreciate risks and consequences."

In Florida, a law was passed in 1994 implementing mandatory life sentences for all first-degree murder convictions, regardless of the age of the defendant. The Supreme Court's ruling will thus affect some Florida defendants who have already been convicted of crimes and sentenced as juveniles. These persons will likely soon be eligible for new sentencing hearings.

According to The New York Times, approximately 2,000 defendants' sentences nationwide could be reviewed. The Florida Department of Corrections has yet to determine how many cases will be up for reevaluation.

Though the Supreme Court ruling represents only a single step towards much needed reform of the juvenile justice system, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

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