

# *Brazil Barely Avoids Law Lowering Criminal Responsibility Age*

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Brasilia, July 2 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The lower house of the Brazilian Congress narrowly rejected a bill that would have amended the country's constitution in favor of reducing the criminal responsibility age to 16 from 18.

If it had been approved, the bill would have meant that those between 16 and 18 were to receive similar sentences as adults and be placed in prisons for adults. Most members of the house voted in favor of the bill but they were short only 5 votes from passing it.

Supporters of the amendment say that it would have served as a deterrent for young people to stay away from crime. "The law is a good law that will end the sense of impunity in our country," the bill's sponsor, Congressman Laerte Bessa said Monday adding that such a move should have been followed by further reductions. "In another 20 years we will reduce it to 14, then 12."

Meanwhile, opponents, including government officials, said that it would have escalated the problem in the already dangerous and overcrowded prisons in the country.

Brazilian Justice Minister José Eduardo Cardozo described the move as an “atomic bomb” for the prison system. He ordered the release earlier this week of his ministry's report on prisons in the country to trigger the dialogue ahead of the vote.

Brazil has the fourth-largest prison population in the world after the United States, China and Russia. While the inmate population in those countries have decreased in recent years, it has increased in Brazil by 33 percent between 2008 and 2014, according to the report by nation's justice ministry.

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