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Missouri Advocate Receives the National Mother of Distinction Award for Efforts in Championing Change in the Juvenile Justice System

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) and the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) presented the National Mother of Distinction Award to Tracy McClard of Cape Girardeau, Missouri. This honor is presented each Mother's Day to one or more mothers who have made an outstanding contribution to the juvenile justice field through working for reform in the juvenile justice system or changing the practice of trying, sentencing, or incarcerating youth in the adult criminal justice system.

"Tracy has become a leading voice for change in Missouri," said Liz Ryan, Executive Director of CFYJ. "With so many kids locked up in adult facilities, we hope that other advocates can take her lead and make changes to their state laws across the country."

McClard has become a leading activist in Missouri to keep youth out of adult jails and prisons. Unfortunately, she experienced first hand what effects this has on kids under the age of 18. At the age of 16, her son Jonathan was incarcerated, charged as an adult, and sentenced to 30 years. During the court proceedings, Jonathan was transferred to various facilities in Missouri. Three days after his 17th birthday, when he was transferred into the adult prison population, Jonathan took his life.

"As a mother of three, I am constantly amazed by Tracy's strength and courage throughout her son's ordeal," said Amanda Hunter, a co-worker at Chaffee High School and nominator. "Not only has she handled this very public tragedy with grace and dignity, she has managed to share her story and work for a cause that may save others' children."

McClard has been a special education teacher at Chaffee Junior-Senior High School in Chaffee, MO for the last six years. She serves as a freshman class sponsor and is very involved with her church. She and her husband Danny reside in Cape Girardeau with their other children, Charles and Suzanne. She is also a grandmother to Jayden McClard.

An estimated 200,000 youth are tried, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults every year across the United States. Most of the youth prosecuted in adult court are charged with non-violent offenses. As many as one-half of the young people held in adult jails are returned to juvenile court or not convicted. However, most of them will have spent at least one month in an adult jail and 1 in 5, will have spent over six months in an adult jail.

Research shows that placing youth in the adult system decreases public safety and puts young people in danger. According to recent reports from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Justice, youth who are prosecuted in the criminal justice system are more likely than youth retained in the juvenile court system to be re-arrested for violent or other crime. They are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility.

“We are so proud of and grateful for all of Tracy’s hard work and dedication in reforming the process of trying youth in the adult justice system,” said Sarah Bryer, Director of the National Juvenile Justice Network. “The vision to fight for what’s right for all of our children is an inspiration to each and every one of us advocating for change.”

For her work to raise awareness about the realities of incarcerating youth in adult jails and prisons, McClard will receive a plaque and an overnight stay at the Drury Inn, as well as gift certificates to Bella Dona Salon and TLC Bed and Breakfast and Wellness Clinic in Cape Girardeau. Special thanks to the CrossRoads Fellowship Church in Jackson, MO for hosting the surprise presentation.

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The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. For more information, visit www.campaignforyouthjustice.org.

The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) enhances the capacity of state-based, juvenile justice organizations to advocate for fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate adjudication and treatment for all children, youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.