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Jonathan's Law Unanimously Clears Legislative Hurdle in Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (February 26, 2013) – This week the Missouri State Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously passed, “Jonathan’s Law”, a bill requiring judges to consider giving minors who have been convicted as adults, a juvenile sentence, and requiring an explanation why if they do not.

Jonathan's Law is in remembrance of Jonathan McClard, who committed suicide in an adult facility at the age of 17. Jonathan was serving a 30 year prison sentence and was en-route to being incarcerated in the general population.

Jonathan's mother, Tracy McClard is the founder of Families and Friends Organized to Reform Juvenile Justice (FORJ-MO). McClard has been a champion for the legislation and says its passage could prevent future tragedies like what happened to her son.

“I am very excited by the support for juvenile justice reform we are receiving from Missouri's state capitol,” said McClard. “The fact that Jonathan's Law passed the senate judiciary committee with a unanimous vote speaks to the great desire to bring our children out of the adult system and once again treat our youth as children and not adults.”

The law, if passed, would do two things:

- The bill extends the procedural timeframe so that certified youth are not eliminated from candidacy for dual jurisdiction simply because of delays inherent to the court system. Dual jurisdiction allows the court to impose a juvenile disposition and simultaneously impose an adult criminal sentence, the execution of which is suspended pursuant to successful completion of programming at the Department of Youth Services (DYS). Currently, only youth who complete the court process before the age of 17 are eligible for DYS. Jonathan’s Law extends the age of eligibility from 17 to 17 and 6 months which will allow more youth to benefit from the dual jurisdiction program.
- This bill clarifies that judges should consider dual jurisdiction, and also issue findings if the court believes that DYS is inappropriate for the youth. The bill does not require the court to order dual jurisdiction, only to consider it.

Jonathan's Law was sponsored by State Representative Wayne Wallingford. Wallingford says the bill has received overwhelming support in Jefferson City.

For more information on Jonathan's Law, please visit:

http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/documents/jonathanslaw_factsheet.pdf

For more on Tracy McClard's story, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/axdku99>

About Families and Friends Organizing for Reform of Juvenile Justice (FORJ-MO): FORJ-MO is the first parent lead juvenile justice organization in Missouri working to change the laws that turn our children into adults, with horrific outcomes, once they enter the adult criminal justice system. For additional information, please visit: <http://www.forj-mo.org/>

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