

EMBARGOED UNTIL:

October 11, 2017, 12:01 a.m.

CONTACT:

Aprill O. Turner

Communications and Media Relations Director

Campaign for Youth Justice

aturner@cfyj.org

(202) 558-3580

New Report Highlights Significant Progress in Keeping Youth Out of the Adult Criminal Justice System

Between 2015 and 2017, nine states and the District of Columbia have passed laws to limit or remove youth from adult facilities

(WASHINGTON, Oct. 11, 2017) -- According to a new report, "Raising the Bar: State Trends in Keeping Youth Out of Adult Courts (2015-2017)," since 2005, 36 states have passed 70 positive pieces of legislation to keep youth from the adult system. The number of youth under 18 automatically excluded from juvenile court has been nearly cut in half from 175,000 youth in 2007 to 90,900 youth in 2014. The number is expected to drop again in 2020 when Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, and New York fully implement their laws passed in 2016 and 2017.

"These legislative victories are not just good from youth they set historic precedent in our country," says Marcy Mistrett, CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice. "Once New York and North Carolina fully implement their laws it will be the first time since the creation of the juvenile court in the United States that 16-year olds are not automatically treated as adults simply because of their age. That is huge and it will change the lives of thousands of kids."

In addition to keeping youth out of adult court, there has been positive momentum toward moving youth out of adult jails and prisons. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the December 31 one-day count of youth in adult prisons has dropped nearly 65% from 2,779 youth in 2009 to 993 youth in 2015.

The impact of housing youth in adult facilities presents an urgent concern. Youth in Texas, Louisiana, and New York have committed suicide as a result of their incarceration in adult jails.

Between 2015 and 2017, nine states and the District of Columbia have passed laws to limit or remove youth from adult facilities. In Oregon and New York, lawmakers passed bills in 2017 to categorically ban incarcerating youth with adults in the coming year.

There has also been significant efforts to limit which youth are eligible to be placed in the adult system and to give juvenile court judges more discretion to determine whether a youth should be transferred to adult court. In 28 states, there are laws that automatically exclude youth from the juvenile system if they have been charged with a certain offense. Some of these states have no lower age of exclusion from the juvenile court, so 8, 10, and 12-year-old children can be prosecuted as adults. From 2015-2017, 19 states and DC have pushed back against these laws by raising the age that a youth is eligible to be transferred to the adult system, limiting the types of offenses that can result in transfer to the adult system, or creating mechanisms to help youth return to juvenile court.

In California and Vermont, voters and legislators respectively, ended the ability for prosecutors to decide on their own whether a youth should be tried in the adult system. Both states have restored power back to juvenile court judges to make individualized determinations based on factors outlined in their laws.

“While states have made significant progress there is still a lot of work to do,” according to Jeree Thomas, Policy Director and author of the report. “There are still five states that automatically treat all 17-year olds as adults, we still have young people suffering physical and sexual trauma in adult jails and prisons, and while we are seeing numbers decline, we are also seeing racial disparities increase. The fight for these young people’s future is far from over.”

For more information visit: www.campaignforyouthjustice.org

###

The Campaign for Youth Justice, based in Washington, DC, is dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing, and incarcerating youth under 18 in the adult criminal justice system.