



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

“Youth Justice Awareness Month”
Guide to Passing a Resolution

Prepared by the Campaign for Youth Justice

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CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Dear Youth Advocate:

Congratulations! You've decided to get involved with National Youth Justice Awareness Month!

National Youth Justice Awareness Month (YJAM) is held every October as an opportunity for communities, families, youth, and allies to host actions and events that expose the consequences of children being prosecuted and incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system. With events happening throughout the country, YJAM is not only a time to raise awareness but also a time to build collective action, to strengthen relationships with other advocates and elected officials, and to join local advocacy campaigns working to create policy changes.

This year, we're launching an effort to get elected officials, at either the local or state level, to officially declare October to be Youth Justice Awareness Month. This can take the form of a locally passed resolution, or a Governor issued proclamation. While our goal focuses on local and state officials, getting resolutions passed at churches, schools, or other institutions can be an effective demonstration of public support and lead to a larger resolution or proclamation.

Though it may seem like a symbolic act, the process of getting a resolution passed will help you develop relationships with your elected representatives and provide a forum for spreading your message. It will be a stepping stone to bigger things. Our hope is that collectively, we can move the White House to declaring October Youth Justice Awareness Month as well!

In taking action, you will be joined by many others throughout the country. You will not only be strengthening your own campaign, but helping to build a national movement to get our kids out of the adult criminal justice system. In this long-term movement-building effort every resolution, no matter how small, will matter. We will continue supporting your work on this after YJAM is over, so don't worry if you haven't succeeded in the short time between now and October 31.

This guide contains:

- Tips on getting started
- Step-by-step instructions on how to pass a resolution
- Templates and sample materials

We hope you find this information helpful as we work together to make a difference in the lives of our nation's children. For answers to any questions that you may have, please contact State Campaign Coordinator Brian Evans at: bevans@cfyj.org or 202-558-3580 ext. 1606.

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DRAFT YOUTH JUSTICE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the historical role of the juvenile court system is to rehabilitate and treat youthful offenders while holding them accountable and maintaining public safety and is therefore better equipped to work with youth than the punitive nature of the adult criminal justice system;

WHEREAS youth are developmentally different from adults and these differences have been documented by research on the adolescent brain and acknowledged by the US and State supreme courts, many state and federal laws that prohibit youth under age 18 from taking on major adult responsibilities such as voting, jury duty, and military service;

WHEREAS youth who are placed under the commitment of the juvenile court system are able to access age appropriate services, education, and remain closer to their families, all of which reduces the likelihood of future offending;

WHEREAS an estimated 200,000 youth are tried, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults every year in the United States and most of the youth are prosecuted for non-violent offenses;

WHEREAS most laws allowing the prosecuting of youth as adults were enacted prior to research evidence by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention demonstrating that youth prosecuted in adult court actually decreases public safety as, on average, they are 34 percent more likely to commit future crimes than youth retained in the juvenile system;

WHEREAS youth of color and youth with disabilities and mental health issues are disproportionately represented at all stages of the criminal justice system;

WHEREAS it is harmful to public safety and to young offenders to confine youth in adult jails or prisons where they are significantly more likely to be physically and sexually assaulted and where they are often placed in solitary confinement;

WHEREAS youth sentenced as adults receive an adult criminal record which deters future education or employment opportunities and the collateral consequences normally applied in the adult justice system should not automatically apply to youth arrested for crimes before the age of 18;

WHEREAS youth who receive extremely long sentences deserve an opportunity to demonstrate their potential to grow and change;

BE IT RESOLVED that the State/City/County/etc. of _____, declares October YOUTH JUSTICE AWARENESS MONTH.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 2015

How to Get Started

Getting your City or County government to pass a resolution, or getting your Governor to issue a proclamation, is an excellent way to strengthen your campaign, as well as to educate and promote awareness in about your issue. While passing a resolution may sound intimidating at first, do not fear! This guide will help you understand what needs to be done and how to do it.

General Tips:

- Every community will have its own particular priorities. Recognizing the key priorities of your community will help you decide where best to first focus your efforts.
- Go for the easy wins first. If your local or state government officials are unresponsive, get resolutions from churches, schools and other community groups, and then bring those to the attention of your elected representatives.
- When you are developing your goals, be detailed and realistic by setting numeric benchmarks and evaluating your success afterwards.
- Don't be afraid to ask! Your community may have resources that you are unaware of to help you save money, advertise, and educate. There may be individuals in your neighborhood who have been through a similar process before and can give helpful, specific advice—don't be afraid to seek them out.

So...how do you do it?

Step 1: Identify

Before you begin, decide at which government level (city, county, state, etc.) you are going to aim to get the resolution passed. This is best decided through a bit of research. Things to look into:

- Is your Governor open to supporting your effort? Is so, **start there**.
- Based on demographics, voting histories, and other factors, **will your community or state likely be receptive** to declaring a Youth Justice Awareness Month? Is your county a better target than your city or state, or vice-versa? Do you need to get resolutions from churches, schools etc. first to convince your local government to take action?
- **Does your state Governor work fairly quickly?** At first, target the level of government that gives possibility of a fairly quick, easy process. If you know your state will be divided on the issue for 3 years, maybe try targeting your county or city.

- Is there a **specific individual** in your local or state government that has a history of advocating for youth or criminal justice? If so, seek them out and become their new best friend. They will be your “champion”.
- **Are there previous resolutions/proclamations** that target a similar audience? Use these as an example.

Once you have assessed the level of government that you wish to work on, identify the process you will follow or individuals whom you must contact. While you may not need to contact them right away, it is good to have their information handy and understand your target’s specific steps for passing a resolution or issuing a proclamation (for example some may prefer email submission over direct contact, some efforts require meetings while others may not). Other things to remember/identify:

- **Start early!** Passing a resolution can take several months (or be relatively quick). Be familiar with your state’s specific process and its general timeline early on.
- **Know the best method to contact your champion.** If they never read their own mail, be sure to email them instead. Short, polite phone calls are usually a good idea, and if you can arrange a short face-to-face meeting, your chances of being remembered and getting a response will increase significantly. Get to know them early on, so that when you are ready to roll, they will be too.
- To find government officials’ contact information, go to your city, county, or state’s website.

Step 2: Research

In order to convince your local representatives that juvenile justice is an important issue that requires an awareness month, it is helpful to research the issue specifically in your community. While general statistics can be effective, it is often more compelling to present local facts that convince elected officials that the problem affects their own constituents.

Some ideas of things to research about your area*:

- General data about number of youth tried as adults each year (and what percentage are tried for non-violent crimes or misdemeanors)
- How many incarcerated youth spend time in adult facilities?
- What opportunities do these youth lack in these adult facilities (often there is no plan for youth in adult facilities and they are forced to spend time in solitary confinement, are without private contact with their families, or lack outside/exercise time)?
- Are there compelling personal stories of youth or their families that might motivated your elected representatives?

**the above is simply a starting point; for my ideas and guidance, contact Brian Evans at: bevans@cfyj.org or 202-558-3580 ext. 1606.*

In addition to any local or state-wide statistics you can find, at the back of this guide there is a general fact sheet about juvenile justice in the U.S. you can use.

Lastly, research different groups and organizations in your area that may support your cause and make note of them. Also, don't be afraid to research groups that may oppose you; learning about them can give you a better idea of what you are facing.

Step 3: Organize and Network

Passing a resolution (or anything else) cannot be done alone. It is vital that you network with people around you – identifying individuals, groups, and organizations that will support your efforts.

Some individuals and groups to think about reaching out to:

- Friends and family members, especially those with experience with the juvenile justice system
- Local clubs, organizations, and groups – don't overlook this, your son's baseball club may have a lot to offer, you never know until you ask! Some ideas:
 - The social justice committees of faith-based organizations
 - Chapters of organizations that advocate for kids or criminal justice reform. CFYJ has a list of national organizations [see http://cfyj.org/images/policybriefs/policyreform/CFYJ_Snapshot_-_Dec_2014.pdf] that have endorsed resolutions against youth in adult court. Accessing the local chapters of these groups might be an easy way to build momentum.
 - College/University chapters or organizations
- Attorneys who defend kids in court, including public defenders
- Local government officials who may be interested in helping
- Academic experts in juvenile justice, adolescent psychology, or neuroscience who may want to get involved

Make sure that as you reach out to individuals and groups for support you keep a list of their names, organizations, phone numbers, and emails for future reference. Once you have a list of contacts and potential allies, arrange a meeting to get everyone together. This can be at your house, at a coffee shop, in a park, wherever is most convenient and comfortable. Don't stress over this first meeting, use it to introduce yourself and your goals, and get to know the people there, being sure to **listen** to their comments and **take very good notes**.

After you have a better idea of your support, you can begin planning for the passing of your resolution.

1. Make a calendar

- a. Based on the timeline of your local government's resolution process, or your Governor's decision-making process, pick a desired date for the resolution proposal to pass or the proclamation to be issued (make sure to give yourself some flexibility since your desired date will almost certainly not be the actual date).
- b. Schedule meetings with your supporters (preferably weekly at the same day and time) from now until that ideal passage date.
- c. If you decide to gather resolutions from local organizations and groups to demonstrate public support, set benchmarks for how many you want to collect each week, or by a certain date.
- d. Identify upcoming opportunities for tabling to promote your resolution or proclamation, and put those dates in your calendar.
- e. Plan some events (speakers, forums, picnics, letter-writing events) where you will promote your resolution or proclamation and put those in your calendar.
- f. Write out a general timeline of media coverage – this will not be perfect, as you will have to be flexible when dealing with reporters and responding to unforeseen events, but a general idea can help you stay on top of things. For example: create social media platforms (Twitter accounts and Facebook pages) early on, schedule dates for letter-to-the-editor submissions, and schedule a big push for media coverage right before and right after the resolution gets a hearing or the proclamation gets issued.
- g. When a hearing date or a proclamation date is announced, be sure to advertise this date as much as possible! For a city or county hearing, a full house can make or break the proposal.

2. Funding: make an outline of the funds you will use to help the resolution pass.

- a. Things to remember to include in your budget:
 - i. Food (for any events or tabling, as well as for your meetings)
 - ii. Postage for any letters or postcards sent out
 - iii. Printing of posters and flyers
- b. How to save money!
 - i. Seek out local businesses that support your cause and may give you a discount for things like printing and food (these businesses can also adopt your resolution!)
 - ii. Put a donation jar out at all of your events
 - iii. Don't be afraid to ask for donations! There may be people who do not have the time to advocate, but can support you with a donation.

Step 4: Educate

It is extremely important that you educate your community both on youth justice and on the resolution/proclamation. Be sure to share your own personal story (how/why you got involved) and also why this is important for your community.

Some ideas on how to educate the public:

- **Reach out to local media.** This can include newspapers, TV stations, and universities' media, anything to help spread the word.
- **Get local groups, organizations, and businesses to pass resolutions.** Be sure to share these resolutions with your targets.
- **Table at local events/locations.** If there is a fair, a picnic, a concert, or any other local gathering see if you can set up a table with some flyers and information (the fact sheet on page 18 is good for this).
- **Collect signatures on a petition to demonstrate support and to grow your supporter list.** This should be done at every public event and can be used along with the resolutions you've gathered to show your elected representatives that people support your effort. Keep track of how many signatures you collect.
- **Continue to extend your network at weekly meetings.** Encourage your supporters to bring their friends and coworkers to learn why this resolution needs their support.
- **Host a public forum.** It may be nice to hold one main event about the resolution/proclamation. Organize a film showing to supplement your presentation, such as "Stick up Kids" or "Childhood Interrupted" (information for films provided on page 12). You may also want to bring in a speaker to boost your cause even more. For help finding a speaker in your area, contact Brian Evans at: bevans@cfyj.org or 202-558-3580 ext. 1606.
- **Organize a letter/postcard writing campaign.** The more support an official perceives the more likely they are to support your cause. Keep track of how many letters or postcards you send. For postcard materials see pages 13-14.

Step 5: Take Action!

Targeting City or County Governments:

Remember your champion – the government official that you identified earlier as sympathetic to the resolution (and your new best friend)? Well now is their time to shine.

- **Reach out to your champion and request a formal meeting.** You should have been in contact with them from the start of this process, but now is the time to get down to business. This is extremely important, as having this official take ownership in the

cause is a necessity to pass the resolution. If you have gotten local groups and organizations to pass your resolution, or if you acquired a lot of petition signatures, bring these to the meeting.

- **Organize a diverse group of individuals from partner organizations to present your case.** This illustrates a wide range community support and ultimately a strong case. Be firm in the necessity of the resolution, and present the most convincing facts and emotionally compelling stories. Also bring a copy of the proposed resolution to the meeting. For help with meeting with representatives, see page 16.
- **Ask your target to introduce the resolution to the council for a vote.** Because they have met with you, heard your case, and have a copy of the resolution their job has been made very easy!
- **If you can, go ahead and meet with other members of your local government.** The more people you can talk to, the more support you can potentially gain. Remember, communicating with your elected representatives is a right, not a privilege. Don't be afraid to make contact with as many officials as possible. Consider making a packet with the resolution, some facts, and a pitch letter to hand out as well. (For an example pitch letter, see page 17).
- **Continue encouraging citizens to call or write their officials** in support of the resolution. The more voices, the better!
- **Pack the house.** On the day your resolution is going to be voted on, make sure you bring as many supporters as you can. Ask one or two people to come prepared with supportive remarks, and make sure someone is taking pictures. This is the last chance to show them how important it is!

Targeting Your Governor:

- Find your state's Governor and contact information on the Internet by searching for "Governor of (your state)".
- Write a polite formal letter to the Governor (see example on page 15), including a copy of the proclamation you want to be issued. Mail it USPS and email it if you are able to obtain the email information from the web site. If you have established a relationship with a champion who has good connections to the Governor's office, meet with them and ask them to make sure your letter gets the attention it deserves.
- If you have gathered resolutions from groups, organizations, or local governments, and/or if you have gathered petition signatures or been organizing letter-writing or postcard mailing efforts, be sure to bring these to the attention of your Governor's office as well.
- Request that the Governor issue the proclamation, but also offer to meet the Governor's staff to discuss the issue if that would be preferable to them.

- Be sure to ask that the proclamation be placed on the Governor's web site.
- No reply from your contact? Follow up with an email or a telephone call 10-14 business days after you sent the original request.

Step 6: Follow Up

Whether or not the resolution is passed, follow up is an important (and often forgotten) step.

If the resolution/proclamation isn't passed:

- **Send thank you notes.** Thank your supporters—including any businesses that helped you, individuals or organizations you worked with—as well as the government officials you worked with or talked to.
- **Don't give up.** Be flexible and evaluate what blocked the resolution from passing, but continue to fight. Awareness can only increase from this point, and now you have more advocacy experience that you can apply in the future.

If the resolution is passed or the proclamation is issued:

- **Organize a Photo-op,** or get yourselves involved with the photo-op your elected officials organize, to promote the resolution or proclamation
- **Celebrate!** Organize a party or event with cake or other food, and use this event to thank your supporters publically.
- **Send thank you notes.** Be sure to include your government officials that supported the resolution as well as the individuals and organizations that helped along the way.
- **Follow up with your community to fulfill the resolution/proclamation.** Begin planning events for next October and spreading the word that it is officially Youth Justice Awareness Month.
- **Keep in touch with the government officials who supported you.** They will continue to be good contacts for implementing the Awareness Month and any further juvenile justice reform efforts you take on. Today's City Council member may be a State Senator tomorrow.
- **Send a copy of the resolution or proclamation to us at the Campaign for Youth Justice so we can help celebrate you and encourage others to follow your lead!**

Please send ALL endorsed resolutions or proclamations (no matter how small the group endorsing them) to:

Brian Evans

Campaign for Youth Justice

1220 L Street NW, Suite 605

Washington, DC 20005

bevans@cfyj.org or 202-558-3580 ext. 1606

Educational Resources

The next few pages contain samples and tips to help you along the way. Check them out and use whatever you like, or create your own from scratch!

Educational materials:

Movie Information:

“Stickup Kid”: a 30 minute video produced by Frontline about a juvenile offender sent to adult prison. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/stickup-kid/>

“Childhood Interrupted”: 20 minute video about youth in the adult criminal justice system. To order a free copy, visit www.campaignforyouthjustice.org.

Policy Briefs:

For reports on more specific topics please visit:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/research/cfyj-policy-briefs>

Some examples include:

- *Keeping Youth Out of Adult Jails and Prisons: New Opportunities Through State Policy Changes and New Federal Regulation*
- *Youth in the Adult Criminal Justice System*
- *America’s Invisible Children: Latino Youth and the Failure of Justice*

Testimonials:

To read parent, youth, researcher, attorney, and other testimonies or to share your own story please visit:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/take-action/share-your-story-testimonials>

Postcard Campaign

Using postcards to spread a message can produce good results in a small amount of time. Postcard campaigns are inexpensive, effective, and easy.

How to conduct a Postcard Campaign

Step 1: Consider your target audience.

Will this postcard be sent to elected officials or the general public? What kind of information will be best suited for informing this audience?

Step 2: Develop a message.

Remember that postcards are relatively small, so you will need to make it succinct. Nobody will bother to read an entire novel squeezed onto a single card. A few large words of text will suffice.

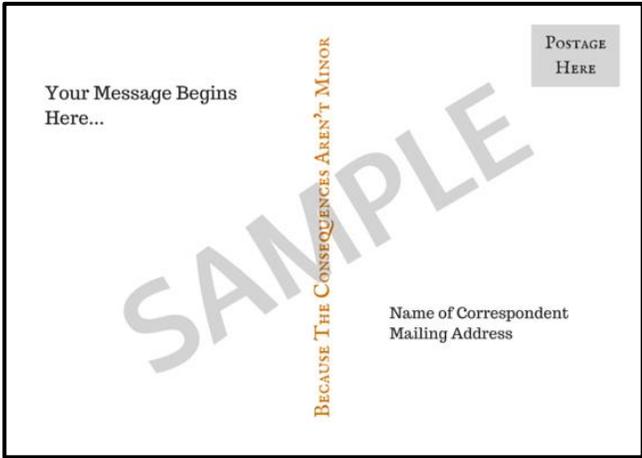
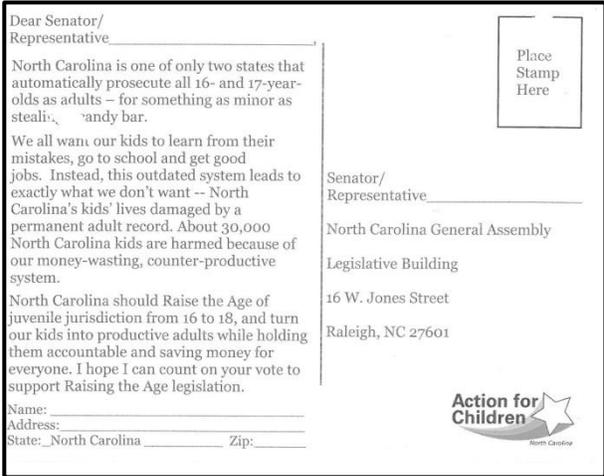
Step 3: Send your postcard to a professional printing company (e.g. Kinko's or an online printer).

Send them your design and ask them to print it onto high-quality postcards. The printer will address the postcards if you provide a mailing list in an Excel spreadsheet. Otherwise you will need to print labels from your computer and affix them to the postcard.

Step 4: Send postcards out to target group, in a timely manner.

On the next page are samples of what your postcard can look like. See the "postcard sample" for your reference.

Sample Postcard Designs



Sample Cover Letter for Governor

Date, 2015

Contact information

Address, phone, fax, e-mail, etc.

Dear Governor's Name:

On behalf of MyOrganization and all those who advocate for juvenile justice in the state of MyState, I would like to ask you to consider issuing a proclamation recognizing the month of October as *National Youth Justice Awareness Month* in the MyState.

National Youth Justice Awareness Month provides an opportunity to spread awareness about the treatment of minors in the adult criminal justice system and a space to contemplate policy alternatives that are better for both public safety and for kids. It is not only a month of awareness but a month of hope for change. Last year, the Michigan Governor Rick Snyder proclaimed the month.

Here you should include some information on how *Youth Justice Awareness Month* will be or has been celebrated in your state. If no *Youth Justice Awareness Month* celebrations have yet taken place in your state, explain how *Youth Justice Awareness Month* could contribute to your state in the future and what is planned for the future.

It is the belief of MyOrganization that a proclamation for *Youth Justice Awareness Month* would bring more attention to this important issue, and bring us closer to enacting better solutions. By making *Youth Justice Awareness Month* official in MyState, you will be joining other states and local governments across the country that are also considering this proclamation. It would be great for the cause of juvenile justice to have *Youth Justice Awareness Month* officially declared in all fifty states and in numerous American cities, and MyOrganization would appreciate your support in helping to make that happen.

Enclosed in this packet is some additional information and a sample proclamation. I am happy to provide more information, or to meet with you or your staff to discuss this matter further.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from your office in the near future.

Sincerely,

Contact's Name

Contact's Phone Number

Contact's Email

Tips for Meeting with Elected Officials or Their Staff

Prior to the meeting

Do some homework:

- Know the basics about legislation concerning youth justice in your state. Before you go into the meeting, practice your “elevator speech” with friends, family, or allies in the effort. An “elevator speech” is a 1-2 minute speech that explains what you want and why it is important). You may have more time, but be prepared to make your pitch quickly just in case.
- Know the details of groups that will be against you. The legislator will want to know who will be fighting you. Be honest but also give your reason why your view is the one they should support.

What to bring:

- Business cards
- Packet of cover letter, fact sheet/key information, draft of resolution/proclamation, copies of resolutions passed by supportive local groups and organizations, or at least information about the number of resolutions, petition signatures, and letters/postcards you have organized.

In the Meeting

Be Personal:

- Tell them about yourself – where you live, what you do for a living, who you represent
- Connect your points to a story (what spurred your involvement in youth justice)

Provide Data:

- Select a key piece of data that supports your point of view. Don’t overwhelm them with facts and statistics, just pick out 1 or 2 things that help your side

Stay Focused:

- They only have a few minutes, be conscious to stay on topic

Ask:

- Before you leave, ask them if they will support the resolution/proclamation, ask if they have any additional questions

After the meeting

Follow-up

- Send a thank you note
- Invite them to a meeting or event you are having so they can see your work in action

Sample Pitch for City or County Elected Official

**the example below is simply a guideline to get you started, feel free to edit it to fit your comfort level and specific situation, or create your own!*

Hi! My name is (name) and I am (job title) from (organization). I live in your district and would love to have your support in a resolution declaring October the National Youth Justice Awareness Month. Youth justice is important in my life because (insert brief, personal reason/story for involvement here). It is also an especially urgent issue in our community because (clear, concise fact specific to the area in which you live).

We need to raise awareness about the treatment of youth in the adult criminal courts and facilities in order to change things for the better. Officially declaring October as Youth Justice Awareness Month will be essential to creating the understanding that will make that change possible.

We have gathered XX resolutions from local groups and businesses, XX petition signatures, and XX letters and postcards in support of Youth Justice Awareness Month. *[If you've gathered a lot of resolutions, petition signatures, or letters, you could drop that number in here, but only if the numbers are impressive ...]*

Me, (your organization), and other community members would greatly appreciate your support in passing this resolution, would you be in favor of doing so? (respond appropriately).

Thank you so much for your time (and support if given) and I look forward to working with you in the future!

LET'S GET KIDS OUT OF ADULT JAILS, COURTS, AND PRISONS

Our children are worth far more than the biggest mistake they have ever made. We cannot simply abandon them to the adult criminal justice system. The practice of transferring youth into adult courts and prisons is:

OVER-USED

- Every year in this country, as many as **200,000** youth are put into the adult criminal justice system.
- In 22 states, children as young as **SEVEN** can be prosecuted as adults.
- Each year **100,000** youth are held in adult jails and prisons.
- Most youth who enter the adult system are there for nonviolent offenses.

DISCRIMINATORY

- African-American youth make up **32%** of those arrested while they only represent **16%** of the overall youth population.
- African American youth are **NINE** times more likely, and Latino youth are **FOUR** times more likely to receive an adult prison sentence for the same crime as white youth.

HARMFUL

- Even though only 1% of all jail inmates were under 18 in 2005 and 2006, they accounted for **21%** and **13%** of the victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence in jails respectively.
- Many children behind bars are placed in isolation where they are locked down **23** hours a day in their cells, for extended periods of time.
- Youth housed in adult jails are **36** times more likely to commit suicide than are youth housed in juvenile detention facilities.

NOT POPULAR

- In a 2011 national poll, **69%** of Americans opposed placement of youth in adult jails and prisons.
- **89%** favored rehabilitation and treatment approaches for youth, such as counseling, education, treatment, restitution, and community services.

A FAILED POLICY

- Research tells us that youth who are prosecuted in the adult system are **34%** more likely to recidivate and with more violent offenses.
- Each year the U.S. incurs an estimated **\$8-\$21 billion** in long-term costs for the confinement of youth.

CHANGING

- In the past **8** years, **23** states have enacted **40** individual pieces of legislation to remove youth from adult jails and prisons, limit the prosecution of youth in adult court, or revise sentencing laws.

To learn more, or get involved in changing things in your state, contact:

Brian Evans, State Campaign Coordinator, Campaign for Youth Justice, 202-558-3580 ext. 1606

bevans@cfyj.org