

CAMPAIGN FOR  
**YOUTH JUSTICE**



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

**April 2008 Newsletter**

The Campaign for Youth Justice is a national organization dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing, and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system.

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## FROM THE HILL



### Youth PROMISE Act Update

The bipartisan Youth PROMISE Act now has over 80 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. The "Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education Act" (Youth PROMISE Act), H.R. 3846, was introduced earlier this year by Representative Robert "Bobby" Scott (D-VA).

In recent months, several gang-related deaths in the Los Angeles area have put pressure on Members of Congress to revert to a "tough on crime" approach. Two bills currently before Congress contain this approach: S. 456 authored by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), which was approved last year by the U.S. Senate, and H.R. 3547, the "Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression Act," sponsored by Representative Schiff (D-CA) in the House of Representatives. These bills, which emphasize punishment and incarceration rather than prevention and early intervention, will lead to increases in racial and ethnic disparities, increased incarceration, and more severe sanctions, such as life without parole, for youth of color in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Action Item: In order to counteract this punitive legislation, advocates are circulating a letter which opposes the Feinstein/Schiff approach and supports the Youth PROMISE Act. If you have not yet signed on, we encourage your organization sign on by Wednesday, May 7th by contacting Angela Arboleda at [aarboleda@nclr.org](mailto:aarboleda@nclr.org). Additionally, please reach out to your colleagues in California and ask them to support the Youth PROMISE Act and contact the California Congressional Delegation on this matter.

For a list of current co-sponsors and for additional information on the Youth PROMISE Act, visit: [http://www.house.gov/scott/hotissues\\_youthpromiseact.shtml](http://www.house.gov/scott/hotissues_youthpromiseact.shtml).

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### Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) Update

The House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee are continuing to work on drafting legislation to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) programs. However, it still remains unclear whether either Chamber of Congress will introduce a reauthorization bill this year.

Along with other juvenile justice advocates involved in the Act 4 Juvenile Justice (Act4JJ) Campaign, CFYJ is working with Congress to craft legislation. We are hopeful that bills in both the House and Senate will contain language on the following issues: removing youth from adult jails and prisons, expanding sight and sound separation, strengthening language on reducing racial disparities, improving conditions of confinement, and expanding the deinstitutionalization of status offenders.

Action Item: We encourage you to reach out to your Representatives in Congress and express your support for JJDDPA reauthorization and the priorities listed above. Outreach to the offices of Senator Leahy (D-VT), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Representative Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the House Education and Labor is particularly critical at this time.

For more information on both the JJDDPA and Act4JJ, visit: [www.act4jj.org](http://www.act4jj.org).

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### **Sharing Connecticut Success and Promoting Representative Murphy's Juvenile Justice Improvement Act**

On April 24th, Abby Anderson, Executive Director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, briefed staff of Connecticut's Congressional Delegation to share highlights of the success in Connecticut on reducing the number of youth prosecuted in adult court.

During the meeting, Abby highlighted Connecticut's "Raise the Age" Campaign which, in 2007, resulted in the Connecticut legislature passing a law that would end the automatic adult prosecution of all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults beginning in 2010. Efforts continue to protect this provision as well as move forward with its implementation.

Abby also noted the passage of a law in 2005 that prohibits status offenders, or youth who violate the law by doing things such as running away or being truant, from being held in juvenile detention. This law went into effect last year and has been successfully implemented in Connecticut over the past several months.

During the meeting, staff from Representative Chris Murphy's (D-CT) office also presented on Rep. Murphy's "Juvenile Justice Improvement Act." This legislation, H.R. 5537, would make changes to the JJDDPA including removing youth from adult jails and prisons, expanding sight and sound separation, improving conditions of confinement, expanding the deinstitutionalization of status offenders, and including incentive grants for States who adopt best practices in juvenile justice reform.

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### **Highlighting Work in Wisconsin**

On April 24th, Wendy Henderson from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) met with staff of Members of Wisconsin's Congressional Delegation. During these meetings, Wendy highlighted work being done in Wisconsin to end the practice of automatically prosecuting 17-year-olds as adults and placing youth in adult jails.

In recent months, the Wisconsin legislature conducted a legislative audit to evaluate the cost of

this change. Although the audit contained information supporting raising the age in Wisconsin, it correlated this change with a high cost to counties. Wendy conducted an analysis of the audit which strengthened the argument against prosecuting 17-year-olds as adults but reexamined the cost associated with the change. For more information on these efforts, please visit WCCF's website at [http://www.wccf.org/proj\\_justice.php](http://www.wccf.org/proj_justice.php).

## ACROSS THE COUNTRY

### Connecticut Representative Toni Walker Presents at NCSL Spring Forum

On April 25th, Connecticut Assembly Representative Toni Walker presented "Juvenile Jurisdiction and Records" to fellow state legislators at the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) Spring Forum. Rep. Walker discussed the "Raise the Age CT" campaign, including the history, rationale, and process of affecting legislative change which led to the passage of legislation that will return 16- and 17-year-olds to juvenile court in 2010. Rep. Walker offered insight from her experience leading legislative reform to legislators from other states considering changes in how their states prosecute youth as adults. Despite having to present by phone, as the Connecticut General Assembly was still in session during its final week, she was successful in engaging her fellow state legislators in the topic, many of whom continued the discussion of their states' policies long after she had finished.

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### Youth in the Adult Criminal Justice System Highlighted at Coalition for Juvenile Justice Conference

On April 25th, the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA), Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), the Illinois Juvenile Justice Initiative (IJJI), the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), and the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) presented the workshop "Youth in the Adult Criminal Justice System: Successful Strategies for Reform" at the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's (CJJ) annual conference in Washington, DC. The panel highlighted successful strategies towards ending the practice of trying youth as adults and the partnerships that have been created between parents, youth, advocates, service providers, legislators, and state agencies. Panelists discussed challenges and successful strategies that could be replicated in other jurisdictions around other issues. Links to these successful efforts are provided below:

- The **Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA) website** provides information, research, and publications on current initiatives and successes in Connecticut related to promoting safe, effective, and equitable services for children and adolescents involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the juvenile justice system. Available at: <http://www.ctjja.org/index.html>.
- The **Connecticut Juvenile Justice Policy and Operation Coordinating Committee (JJPOCC) website** contains information and agendas from this committee created to monitor and oversee the changes in the Connecticut juvenile justice system that will be

necessary to expand juvenile services to 16- and 17-year-olds. Available at: <http://www.housedems.ct.gov/jjpooc/index.asp>.

- The **Connecticut Juvenile Jurisdiction Planning and Implementation Committee (JJPIC) website** provides information and agendas from this committee responsible for submitting a fiscally responsible proposal with recommendations for raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction in Connecticut. The JJPIC convened during 2006 and 2007 and heard testimony from representatives of Connecticut state agencies as well as advocates, researchers, and social service practitioners. Available at: <http://www.housedems.ct.gov/jjplic/index.asp>.
- The **Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) Justice for Wisconsin Youth Project Publications website** contains a listing of publications related to juvenile justice reform in Wisconsin as well as copies of recent testimony and press releases presented to the Wisconsin Joint Legislative Audit Committee as part of an audit requested on the effects of criminal court jurisdiction on Wisconsin 17-year-olds. Available at: [http://www.wccf.org/justice\\_pub.php](http://www.wccf.org/justice_pub.php).
- The **Illinois Juvenile Justice Initiative website** provides factsheets, reports, news articles, and updates regarding efforts in Illinois to remove 17-year-old misdemeanants from adult court jurisdiction and reduce the number of youth in custody. Available at: [http://www.jjustice.org/index.cfm?page\\_id=1](http://www.jjustice.org/index.cfm?page_id=1).
- The **National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) Member Directory** provides state-specific information on NJJN members, publications, contacts, and juvenile justice data. Available at: [http://www.njjn.org/members\\_public.html](http://www.njjn.org/members_public.html).

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### **Wisconsin Council on Children and Families Hosts Juvenile Justice Reform Conference**

On April 15th and 16th, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families hosted the conference, "Moving Forward: A Justice System That Works for Juveniles and the Community." The conference focused on strategies for transforming the state's juvenile justice system to better align with best practices and the needs of youth.

Conference topics of discussion included the current proposal to return 17-year-olds to the juvenile system, the report commissioned by the Wisconsin Governor on racial disparities in the system, and advocacy tools for juvenile justice reform. Attendees included over 300 individuals who work with juveniles, including social workers, juvenile court workers, attorneys, psychologists, teachers, court and corrections personnel and judges. CFYJ coordinated the "Juvenile Justice Advocacy" session in which opportunities and tools for advocacy were discussed. Vicky Gunderson, a parent advocate, also spoke about her family's experience with a child in an adult facility and her involvement in juvenile justice reform activities in Wisconsin.

## **Justice Policy Institute Releases Report on Exploding Incarcerated Population**

A new report from the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) finds that communities are bearing the cost of a massive explosion in the jail population which has nearly doubled in less than two decades. The report, *Jailing Communities: The Impact of Jail Expansion and Effective Public Safety Strategies*, found that jail population growth (22 percent), has resulted in costs of tens of billions of dollars each year to communities. More than ever before jails are warehousing people, who have not been found guilty of any crime, for longer periods of time. The report also notes that the impact of increased jail imprisonment is not borne equally by all members of a community. New data reveals that Latinos are most likely to have high bail amounts, and African Americans are nearly five times as likely to be incarcerated in jails as whites. The report makes several recommendations for communities to take action to reduce jail populations and increase public safety. For more information on *Jailing Communities*, contact LaWanda Johnson at 202-558-7974 ext. 308 or download the report at <http://www.justicepolicy.org>.

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## **Wisconsin Governor's Commission Releases Report on Racial Disparities in Justice System**

In response to reports detailing the racial disparities in Wisconsin's criminal justice system, Governor Jim Doyle appointed the Governor's Commission on Reducing Racial Disparities in the Wisconsin Justice System in 2007. The commission recently released its Final Report which offers recommendations in order to address racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. The report links the overrepresentation of youth of color in adult prisons to current juvenile justice policies. For this reason, the Commission recommends returning 17-year-olds to the original jurisdiction of the juvenile court, while maintaining the current waiver practices that allow transfer of the most serious cases to the adult system. National Juvenile Justice Network member and CFYJ partner, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, testified before the Commission. A bill to return 17-year-olds to the original jurisdiction the juvenile court will likely be reintroduced in both houses of the Wisconsin legislature at the beginning of the next session. The Commission's report is available at <http://www.equaljustice.wi.gov>.

## MEDIA WRAP



### The Campaign Hits YouTube

The Campaign for Youth Justice now has a presence on YouTube! We have created a channel called "jjreform" which can be accessed at [www.youtube.com/jjreform](http://www.youtube.com/jjreform). Currently, there are several videos that represent the juvenile justice issue of transfer and youth in adult prisons and jails, including a success story that aired in Vermont which includes an interview with Senator Patrick Leahy, chairman of the US Senate Judiciary Committee. In addition, the "Favorites" section includes the following: a Caron Butler biography, Anne-Marie Ambrose testifying on Capital Hill, the NAACP State of Emergency video, an interview with former Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Administrator Shay Bilchik, and a Connecticut TV story about Congressman Chris Murphy's (D-CT) juvenile justice legislation. We will continue to update this new channel with relevant videos from news stories, formerly incarcerated youth, experts, and more. If you have or know of an informative video on the prosecution of youth as adults that you would like us to add, please contact Eric Solomon at [esolomon@cfyj.org](mailto:esolomon@cfyj.org) or 202.558.3580 ext. 20.

## VOICES



The incarceration of children deeply affects parents. This month and next month, in honor of Mother's Day, we feature the voices of moms as they tell of their experience of having a child in the adult system.

### **Lisa, mother of a child who spent 72 days awaiting trial in an adult jail, writes:**

*"I can not describe how horrid it was when my son was jailed [as a teenager]. Gone, in a minute, were the hopes and dreams. Gone was my child. Gone were the responsibilities of raising my son. Now, it was up to the staff at the facility. Would they take care to shelter him from the other inmates? Would the system care that he was vulnerable, afraid and extremely anxious? As a mother, my desire and obligation to raise my son to be a gentleman was taken away...How [could] I continue being a mom, when the most important element to the equation [was] missing?"*

### **Tracy, mother of a young man who committed suicide in an adult jail, writes:**

*"When [my son, Jonathan,] was placed in the adult system for 30 years, all hope for his future died. I lost all rights as his parent. They could put him on any medication or take him off at will...he was medicated so heavily that he was having hallucinations. Yet, the only thing Jonathan was concerned about was his*

education...he still wanted to become a doctor. [But,] the justice system...threw him away...My son spent Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and his birthday in solitary confinement and then, on January 1, 2008, three days after his 17th birthday, my precious, bright, gift from God used bed sheets to hang himself. There was nothing worse than watching Jonathan lose all hope and die inside...[I was] not able to comfort him or touch him or talk to him when he most needed it...[I wonder] how long he hung there before he died. His father, brother, sister, and I spend our days crying and wondering how in the world our sons' life [was] taken from our loving grasp and just thrown away."

**Judy, mother of an incarcerated child, writes:**

*"As a mother of a 16-year-old son serving as an adult in the prison system, I feel angry...The prison system is not set up properly to handle the emotional, mental, and physical needs that children have...[My son] lacks the judgment, social skills, intellect, and confidence of an adult male [necessary] to look out for his own interests...the prison system does not care that I am his mother. I feel helpless, hopeless, devastated, and heartbroken that I cannot get him the help he so desperately needs."*

**ON THE CALENDAR**

**Don't Forget About Mother's Day!**

Make Mother's Day special for the moms of incarcerated youth by checking out our "Mother's Day Toolkit" which provides ideas and sample materials for recognizing mothers who are working to change the way the justice system treats children, connecting mothers and their children on Mother's Day, and raising awareness about this important issue. The toolkit is available at:

[http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/advocacy\\_center.html](http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/advocacy_center.html).



Mother's Day is just around the corner on May 11th and you may have no idea how to recognize the mothers in your life. You could always buy that overpriced box of chocolates or the usual bouquet of flowers, but why not give something that reflects your shared support of our nation's youth? Make a donation to the Campaign for Youth Justice to honor a mom in your life and we will send her a great Mother's Day card with information about us and how she can make a difference in her community. Go to <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/donate.html> to donate money to a great cause, give someone special an unexpected gift, and eliminate the stress of last-minute shopping.

**CFYJ WELCOMES NEW STAFF**

**Shantá Gray, Administrative Coordinator**

The Campaign for Youth Justice welcomes Shantá Gray as our new Administrative

Coordinator. Shantá comes to us from The Interfaith Alliance, a nonpartisan advocacy organization that promotes the role religion in public life, where she coordinated field activities. At the Campaign, Shantá will be responsible for making our office run smoothly through managing the administrative operations of the office. She is excited to be learning new skills and coordinating new projects. Born and raised here in Washington, Shantá has degrees in Criminal Justice degree from Prince George's Community College and Sociology from Bowie State University in Maryland. She hopes to attend Trinity University for her Master's in Counseling. In her free time, Shantá enjoys shopping and traveling to warm places near blue oceans, like Jamaica and the Bahamas.

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