

Good Afternoon. My name is William Rivera. I am 19 years old and a resident of the District of Columbia. I was asked to be here by the Campaign For Youth Justice. I would like to share with you my experiences as a youth incarcerated in the adult prison system. Thank you for this opportunity.

In November of 2005, when I was just 17 years old, I was charged and incarcerated as an adult at the DC Jail. I served eight months at the DC Jail, followed by 5 months at CTF-Correctional Treatment Facility where I was sent to complete a Youth Act Study. At CTF, I spent several months in what is known as "the hole" or solitary confinement. I received a two-year sentence and was initially sent to Lewisberg Federal Penitentiary in Lewisberg PA, a maximum security facility. I was not supposed to be sent to a maximum-security facility because I received my sentencing under the Youth Act. When the Bureau of Prisons realized this, they transferred me to McKean Federal Correctional Institution where I served the remainder of my sentence. I was released in December 2007 and returned home to Washington, DC.

I sincerely regret the mistakes that I have made. I am dedicated to changing my life and to making up for the harm that I caused by making a positive contribution to my community. I am currently enrolled in college where I am studying Business Administration. My goal is to become an accountant. I also plan to work with at-risk minority youth to help them live healthy, positive and violence-free lives and pursue their education. I will never give up in this pursuit.

My experience at the DC Jail was very hard. At the jail I was the only Latino on the unit and I felt extremely isolated. There were many fights. At CTF, my cellmate and I were jumped and beaten by seven other inmates so badly that I had to be taken to the hospital. The inmates who attacked me kicked my face, chipped my teeth and stabbed me under my eye. During my incarceration, I witnessed many acts of violence that would go unnoticed by correctional officers. The medical treatment was insufficient and the mental health services were not effective. It is my belief that they did not understand how to treat youth. If you couldn't sleep they just gave you pills. When I was there, I believe some kids were overmedicated. It did not seem to be well-monitored. There were several suicide attempts among the youth that officers and mental health professionals were not aware of or did not care to know about. I personally was involved in talking down one youth from taking his own life.

The juveniles I was incarcerated with brought the street conflicts with them into the jail. This resulted in an explosive environment. I felt that the guards should have paid more attention. By treating these youths as adults, they only became more aggressive and the hatred just built up inside. Youth my age should not go through this stuff.

I realize that conditions might have improved since I was at the jail and this is a good thing. Even so, I do not believe that an adult jail is an appropriate place for juvenile offenders. I am here to express my belief that Title 16 youths are in need of special attention and programs that simply weren't available at the DC Jail, which is clearly designed for adults. For example, I recommend one-on-one counseling to help youths

cope with the trauma of being incarcerated. Youths also need a special program devoted to helping them with reentry. When you are 16, 17 or 18 years old, it is very hard to come back and adjust to society. Many of the young guys I was with came home without a GED. They have fallen way behind and they are now too old to return to their high schools. So they returned with little education, a felony record, and they are still carrying the emotional burden of their experience in a harsh and violent environment. How do you expect them to succeed? These youths need extremely specialized programming and support.

I work hard every day to heal from my experiences in the adult system. I am always looking over my shoulder and feel anxious, tense, stiff and angry. If there is anything I can do to keep other youths from undergoing this same experience, I will do it. That is why I am here today.

Thank you.