


CAMPAIGN FOR

YOUTH  JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Mother's Day Toolkit

1012 14th Street, N.W., Suite 610
Washington, DC 20005
202-558-3580
www.campaignforyouthjustice.org

Dear Advocate,

Mother's Day is just around the corner! Celebrated in the United States since 1872, Mother's Day is a time when children and their families across the country show moms how important they are in their lives. Moms are showered with cards, gifts, flowers and affection from their children and families.

Not all mothers, however, are able to celebrate Mother's Day with their children. For some moms, Mother's Day is just one more day that their children spend behind bars. Instead of spending the day with Mom, thousands of youth will be away from their moms, residing in adult jails and prisons. Instead of receiving flowers or presents, the mothers of these children will spend Mother's Day worrying about their children's future. Will they be able to get an education while incarcerated? Will they be able to find a job once they are released? And many Moms have worked tirelessly to change the way the justice system treats children. Their efforts may have gone unrecognized and unappreciated.

We hope you will join the Campaign for Youth Justice in recognizing mothers who are working to change the justice system for their children as well as so many others. This toolkit provides ideas and sample materials for connecting mothers and their children on Mother's Day, engaging more mothers in your advocacy efforts, and raising awareness about this important issue.

Together, we can make this Mother's Day special.

Sincerely,

The Campaign for Youth Justice

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What You Can Do!

1) Recognize mothers in your community who have worked to change the justice system

- Write about a mom in your organization's newsletter (see page 4 for sample)
- Recognize a mom at a meeting or event and submit a press release to local media (see page 5 for sample)
- Contact the media in your community and urge them to do a story about a mom in your community

2) Help connect moms and their jailed and incarcerated children this Mother's Day

- Organize a bus or van to take mothers to visit their children in adult jails and prisons on Mother's Day; invite a local reporter to join you
- Sponsor a special Mother's Day drive to raise resources for transportation, long-distance phone calls, or special care packages for mothers to share with incarcerated children; invite the local media to cover the event
- Host a Mother's Day card or gift-making party for youth in an adult jail or prison so that moms hear from their children on their special day

3) Raise awareness and take action for youth in adult prisons and jails

- Host a video screening of the DVD "Childhood Interrupted" at your home, community center, or faith gathering (see page 10 for how to get a copy)
- Write postcards to your state officials and Members of Congress (see page 6 for sample text)
- Sponsor a 'Take Action' table at an upcoming event (for potential materials, see page 10); alert the media that your event is taking place (see page 5 for press release format)
- Write a letter to the editor or submit an article to your local newspaper or community paper (see page 7)
- Urge the leader of your faith community to give a Mother's Day talk on the incarceration of youth as adults (see page 8 for sample talk)

4) Support parent advocacy efforts

- Invite donations or sponsor a fundraiser for parent advocacy organizations
- Volunteer with parent advocacy organizations
- Encourage families to join the National Parent Caucus (for more information, visit: <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/parents-resource-center.html>)

Sample Newsletter Article

Mother's Day: Honoring Moms in our Community *Local Mother Recognized for her Advocacy on behalf of Children*

This Mother's Day, *[insert organization's name]* recognizes *[insert honoree's name]* for her efforts to change juvenile justice policies.

"We are grateful for *[insert honoree's name]* work in advocating tirelessly to change our state's policies so that all children will benefit," says *[insert organization's contact]*. "We applaud her work this Mother's Day as she has demonstrated tenacious leadership toward changing state policies that make it too easy to try, sentence and incarcerate children in the adult criminal justice system."

In *[insert state]*, youth can be tried, sentenced or incarcerated as adults as young as *[insert age]*. Youth tried as adults face the same punishments as adults. They can be placed in adult jails pre- and post-trial, sentenced to serve time in adult prisons, or be placed on adult probation with few to no rehabilitative services. They are also subject to the same sentencing guidelines as adults and may receive mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole.

"*[insert honoree's name]* has worked to raise awareness about how our state treats its most vulnerable population: children," says *[insert contact]*. "Now it is up to our state's public officials to enact these necessary reforms to rehabilitate youth and strengthen public safety."

[insert background information about the honoree]

For her work to change juvenile justice policies, *[insert honoree's name]* will receive *[insert information about the award and prize]*.

[insert paragraph about the organization recognizing the mother]

For more information, contact *[insert name, organization, email, website and phone #]*.

Sample Press Release Recognizing a Mother

[print on organization's letterhead]

For Immediate Release
[insert date]

Contact: *[insert name]*
[insert phone #]

Mother's Day: Honoring Moms in our Community *Local Mother Recognized for her Advocacy on behalf of Children*

(insert city, state) -- This Mother's Day, *[insert organization's name]* recognizes *[insert honoree's name]* for her efforts to change juvenile justice policies.

"We are grateful for *[insert honoree's name]* work in advocating tirelessly to change our state's policies so that all children will benefit," says *[insert organization's contact]*. "We applaud her work this Mother's Day as she has demonstrated tenacious leadership toward changing state policies that make it too easy to try, sentence and incarcerate children in the adult criminal justice system."

In *[insert state]*, youth can be tried, sentenced or incarcerated as adults as young as *[insert age]*. Youth tried as adults face the same punishments as adults. They can be placed in adult jails pre- and post-trial, sentenced to serve time in adult prisons, or be placed on adult probation with few to no rehabilitative services. They are also subject to the same sentencing guidelines as adults and may receive mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole.

"*[insert honoree's name]* has worked to raise awareness about how our state treats its most vulnerable population: children," says *[insert contact]*. "Now it is up to our state's public officials to enact these necessary reforms to rehabilitate youth and strengthen public safety."

[insert background information about the honoree]

For her work to change juvenile justice policies, *[insert honoree's name]* will receive *[insert information about the award and prize]*.

###

[insert paragraph about the organization recognizing the mother]

For more information, contact *[insert name, organization, email, website and phone #]*.

Sample Post Card Text

Please Note:

The text below contains samples of what you can write on a postcard or letter to your state officials or Members of Congress. Postcards and letters are most effective when you handwrite your message and put your message into your own words. Also, it is helpful if you can include specific bill numbers if there is pending legislation in your state and any other relevant state data. To find out who your federal elected officials are and how to contact them, visit: www.congress.org.

For State Officials:

Happy Mother's Day!

This Mother's Day, many children will be far away from their Mothers in adult jails and prisons. These children could better be served in the juvenile justice system, as research shows that trying youth as adults increases violence and crime and puts young offenders in danger of abuse and suicide.

As the public supports rehabilitation and treatment for youth, please support efforts to help our youth and keep our communities safe.

Sincerely,

[insert your name and address]

For Members of Congress:

Dear _____,

As a constituent of your district, I ask for your support adequate funding for the **Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act (JJDPDA)**. The JJDPDA has, for more than 30 years, provided direction and support for juvenile justice system improvements and significantly contributed to the reduction of juvenile crime and delinquency. The JJDPDA sets out federal standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system.

Adequate funding for the JJDPDA will:

- protect children from the dangers of adult jails
- improve safety for youth in custody
- require states to take steps to reduce racial disparities and increase fairness in the juvenile justice system
- provide funds for effective delinquency prevention programs

The continuing success of effective juvenile crime prevention and deterrence depends on Congress providing funding resources needed for states and localities to implement the law.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[insert your name and address]

Sample Letter to the Editor or Newspaper Article

Please Note:

The text below is a sample of what you can send to your local or community newspaper. Letters to the editor are most effective if you can connect your letter to a recent article in the paper on the same topic. Also, it is helpful if you can include specific bill numbers if there is pending legislation in your state or any other relevant state data. If possible, try to keep your letter to the editor to 200 words or less.

Dear Editor,

This Mother's Day, it is important to recognize that many children will be far away from their Mothers in adult jails and prisons. These children would be better served in the juvenile justice system. Youth in adult jails and prisons are at serious risk of physical and emotional harm and even suicide. They often sleep in excess of 15 hours each day and are often placed in isolation for up to 23 ½ hours per day. Typically they do not receive adequate nutrition and exercise and lack educational programming.

In [*insert state*], youth can be tried, sentenced or incarcerated as adults as young as [*insert age*]. Youth tried as adults face the same punishments as adults. They can be placed in adult jails pre- and post-trial, sentenced to serve time in adult prisons, or be placed on adult probation with few to no rehabilitative services. They are also subject to the same sentencing guidelines as adults and may receive mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole.

Research shows that prosecuting youth as adults increases violence and risk of re-offending. According to a 2010 Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention (OJJDP) report, youth who are prosecuted as adults are much more likely to commit crimes than youth retained in the juvenile justice system.

On this special day, we ask our state's officials to support efforts to help our youth and keep our communities safe by keeping our youth out of the adult criminal justice system and removing youth from adult jails and prisons.

Sincerely,

[*insert your name and address*]

Sample Mother's Day Faith Community Talk

This Mother's Day let's honor our mothers. Unfortunately, not all mothers are able to celebrate Mother's Day with their children. Why, you ask? For some moms, Mother's Day is just one more day that their children spend behind bars. Instead of spending the day with Mom, thousands of youth will be away from their moms, residing in adult jails and prisons.

Thousands of young people are at risk every day of facing harmful and irreversible consequences, often for minor mistakes. Some researchers estimate that as many as 250,000 youth are prosecuted as adults every year. Despite overwhelming research demonstrating that these policies have failed, statutes that prosecute youth in the adult criminal justice system remain on the books.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Injustice anywhere threatens justice everywhere." We should all be alarmed by these injustices our children bear.

In 13 states, youth are automatically tried and sentenced as adults no matter how minor their offense; this kind of policy sends thousands of youth to adult court for non-violent offenses.

Children are more likely to re-offend after serving time in adult jails and prisons.

Youth convicted in the adult system receive little or no rehabilitative programming, which is mandated in the juvenile system.

Study after study has demonstrated that youth transferred to adult court are more likely to re-offend than those sent to the juvenile justice system for the same type of offense and with similar prior records. Of those youth who committed new crimes, those sent to adult court re-offended at approximately twice the rate of those sent to juvenile court.

On any given day, more than 10,000 children are in adult jails.

New research on brain development shows that youth do not have all the same capacities as adults and should be treated differently.

Research shows that during adolescence, the brain begins its final stages of maturation and continues to rapidly develop well into a person's early 20s, concluding around the age of 25.

Here in *[insert state]*:

- *[insert state facts about age at which youth can be tried as adults]*
- *[insert state facts about numbers of youth tried as adults]*
- Attorneys in *[insert state]* who represent indigent juvenile defendants are grossly underpaid and in desperate need of training in cases involving transfer or certification of juveniles so they can better represent their charges.

Youth tried in adult criminal court are at greater risk of assault and death in adult jails and prisons, will receive an adult record, may never have access to student financial aid, and will lose their voting rights in many states.

We are locking up our young people at alarming rates. The laws are not evenly applied, with youth of color and those without access to adequate legal counsel more likely to end up in adult correctional facilities.

The practice of trying youth as adults does not promote public safety or reduce crime. Youth are more likely to re-offend when they are tried and incarcerated in the adult justice system.

National studies show that youth of color are treated more harshly than are white youth even when charged with similar offenses.

The practice of sentencing youth as adults most seriously affects African-American, Latino, and Native-American youth.

Youth of color constitute [*insert percentage*] of our population yet make up [*insert percentage*] of youth entering the adult corrections system in [*insert state*].

These laws affect not only individual victims and offenders but also families and communities. The impact is immeasurable.

Invest in a variety of family, community, and school-based programs designed to reduce crime and re-offending.

Many young and first-time offenders are stigmatized by their contact with the criminal justice system without necessarily receiving either appropriate supervision or support. Opportunities exist to divert many of these offenders to individuals and organizations which can better focus on problems that are most effectively handled in a community setting. These could include mentoring programs, counseling, tutorial support, and other options.

The challenge for the community at large is to engage in a broad discussion of the mix of family, community, and government initiatives that can begin to **reverse the cycle** that has been set in motion in recent years.

We must support our families who have a child who is incarcerated during this Mother's Day and through the year. Please reach out to these families during this difficult time of the year.

**Please add scripture from Trial and Tribulations and Redemption

**Consider using a formerly incarcerated person to provide testimony

Resources

“Childhood Interrupted”

This 15 minute DVD is a free resource designed to get people thinking and spark discussion about the practice of trying youth in the adult criminal justice system. The DVD also contains a discussion guide with tips for showing the DVD, hosting a ‘take action table’ and other ways to raise awareness. It is available by contacting the Campaign for Youth Justice at 202.558.3580 or emailing: jointhemovement@cfyj.org.

“State Trends: Legislative Victories from 2005 to 2010 Removing Youth from the Adult Criminal Justice System”

This report contains facts, laws and information about state trends regarding the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth as adults. It features 15 states which have changed their laws in four categories pertaining to youth and the adult justice system.

The full report and executive summary are available online at:

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

“Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America”

Released in November 2007, this national report which presents the latest research on the characteristics of youth incarcerated in U.S. jails and the risks they face. The report is available online at: <http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/key-research/national-reports.html#jailingjuveniles>.

“Juvenile Transfer Laws: An Effective Deterrent to Delinquency”

This report provides an overview of research on the deterrent effects of transferring youth from juvenile to criminal courts, focusing on large-scale comprehensive OJJDP-funded studies on the effect of transfer laws on recidivism. The full report is available at:

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/220595.pdf>

Postcards

These “printer ready” postcards are available free! You can write your own message on the back. Available online at:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/parents-resource-center/parent-tools.html#postcard>.

How to Start a Campaign

This webpage has everything you need to launch your own campaign to diminish the involvement of youth in the adult criminal justice system. It includes organizing tips, guides for reaching the media and your legislators, a guide for contacting youth in the adult criminal justice system, and a take action kit. Start your campaign by visiting:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/advocacy-resource-center.html>