

# CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

July 2009 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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## ACROSS THE COUNTRY

### Virginia Advocates Host Community Youth Justice Jam

Liane Rozzell, parent and organizer of Friends and Allies of Virginia's Youth (FAVY), reports below on the community event organized in Norfolk, Virginia at Ruffner Middle School. Congratulations to Liane and to Kate Duvall of Just Children, CFYJ's Virginia partner, for organizing such a successful event to educate the public and generate conversations about the need for action to change Virginia's transfer law.

Last Friday's Community Youth Justice Jam in Norfolk was a great success. About 200 people of all ages attended and heard a panel of juvenile justice reform experts, including a local juvenile court judge, public defender, and a prosecutor. One of the major topics was the transfer of young people to the adult criminal system.

The prosecutor, Linda Bryant, said that her office is looking closely at how they transfer youth to the adult system, and will no longer use the threat of transfer as a way to get kids to plead guilty in juvenile court. Later this year, an expert on adolescent brain development will train the entire Norfolk Commonwealth's Attorney's office.

A very lively poetry competition followed the panel discussion, with young poets performing poetry with the theme of justice.

Thanks to all who participated in the event!

The *Virginian-Pilot* reported on the event. The article is available at:

<http://hamptonroads.com/2009/07/juvenile-justice-system-examined-gathering>.

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### New Nevada Legislation Ends Automatic Youth Transfer for Certain Crimes

With the passage of a new law, youth age 14 years and older charged with certain crimes in Nevada are no longer required to incriminate themselves in order to keep from being tried as adults. Last year, in the Marques B. and William M. v. Nevada case, two 17-year-old males were tried as adults because they were unable to prove that their actions were influenced by substance abuse, emotional, or behavioral problems.

Their defense attorney, Kristina Wildeveld, appealed the case, arguing that the presumptive certification provision upon which the court based its decision violated the defendants' constitutional rights. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Nevada and the Western

Juvenile Defender Center agreed. The organizations submitted amicus briefs to the court maintaining that the statute denied youth the right to due process and protection against self-incrimination.

On November 26, 2008, the Nevada Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the law was unconstitutional. "This is an important and sweeping decision for Nevada's juvenile justice system," said Lee Rowland, an ACLU attorney.

A few months later, the matter was taken up by the State legislature, and on May 11, 2009, Governor Jim Gibbons signed Assembly Bill 237 into law. The new statute eliminates the exception to the presumptive certification law that the court held unconstitutional. It also raises the age at which a child may be tried as an adult for certain offenses seen as gun-related or violent sexual crimes from 14 to 16 years of age. Under the new law, if the youth has substance abuse, emotional, or behavioral problems that can be treated with services available in the juvenile justice system, he or she may remain in juvenile court for trial.

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## FROM THE HILL

### JJDPA Turns 35 on September 7th

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) is set to turn 35 years old on September 7, 2009. The JJDPA sets out federal standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system. These standards include four core protections that help ensure the health and well-being of youth:

- Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) keeps status offenders, such as runaways and truants, out of secure facilities;
- Adult Jail and Lockup Removal (Jail Removal) prevents youth from being placed in adults jails and lock-ups (with limited exceptions);
- Sight and Sound Separation provides that when youth are detained or incarcerated in adult jails or police lock-ups, they must be separated by both sight and sound from adult offenders;
- Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) requires that states address the disproportionate contact of youth of color with the juvenile justice system.

Currently, juvenile arrest rates are at a historic low, and the continuing success of effective juvenile crime prevention and deterrence in the states depends on Congress strengthening these protections and providing the funding necessary to fulfill such provisions to the greatest extent

possible.

The JJDPA's 35th anniversary provides an important opportunity to draw public attention to the accomplishments of this law and, at the same time, to highlight the need to strengthen the JJDPA to protect children from the dangers of adult jails and prisons, improve safety for youth in custody, and reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

Below are some ideas for celebrating JJDPA's 35th anniversary. For each of these ideas, please strongly consider identifying parents of incarcerated youth, formerly incarcerated youth, and their families and inviting them to participate. As always, the stories of state residents impacted by the juvenile and criminal justice systems are crucial to conveying the message that *JJDPA matters*.

Inviting a formerly incarcerated youth or a parent with a child in the justice system to share his or her personal story at the anniversary event will be extremely powerful. In addition, it is helpful to have other stakeholders lend their voices to the anniversary celebration.

To celebrate the 35th anniversary, you could:

Host a 35th anniversary event and light 35 candles for JJDPA. Stage a media event at a location that helps to commemorate the passage of this landmark federal law, illustrate its importance and call for its reauthorization this year and the strengthening of the core protections. At your event, light 35 candles. Each candle can represent a youth, parent or another stakeholder, or even a JJDPA accomplishment that highlights the JJDPA's importance. Either way, provide the media with a story behind each candle, including how individuals will be impacted by the passage of the JJDPA. Stories from throughout the state could help provide an additional "hook" for reporters from local communities.

Launch an Anniversary Card / Post Card Campaign. Assemble a card-signing/card-making table complete with cards, markers, construction paper and other materials to make cards or postcards. Or make a life size card and ask everyone at your event to sign. Give the life size card or postcards to your congressional delegation members at your event or invite event attendees to sign up to deliver the cards to your members of Congress at their district offices. Consider inviting the press to cover the delivery!

Prepare and place an op-ed. Engage a young person, parent or family member to write an opinion editorial highlighting JJDPA's 35-year record of protecting children in the justice system. Discuss ways in which JJDPA could be strengthened, and urge key policymakers to reauthorize the program now.

Encourage local editors to run an editorial. Provide the material for an editorial commemorating JJDPA's accomplishments and calling for policymakers to strengthen and reauthorize the program now.

For background information on the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), check out the Act 4 Juvenile Justice (ACT4JJ) campaign's website:

Act 4 Juvenile Justice Campaign:

<http://www.act4jj.org>

Statement of Principles:

[http://www.act4jj.org/media/factsheets/factsheet\\_11.pdf](http://www.act4jj.org/media/factsheets/factsheet_11.pdf)

Recommendations & Backgrounder for JJDP:

[http://www.act4jj.org/media/factsheets/factsheet\\_56.pdf](http://www.act4jj.org/media/factsheets/factsheet_56.pdf)

Hearing Testimony:

[http://www.act4jj.org/hill\\_hearings.html](http://www.act4jj.org/hill_hearings.html)

Letters:

[http://www.act4jj.org/hill\\_letters.html](http://www.act4jj.org/hill_letters.html)

Take Action Packet:

[http://www.act4jj.org/media/documents//document\\_39.doc](http://www.act4jj.org/media/documents//document_39.doc)

Media Clips:

[http://www.act4jj.org/media\\_print.html](http://www.act4jj.org/media_print.html)

Please let us know about your event plans and outcomes! We'll feature all the 35th anniversary events in our September newsletter.

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### **House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security Conducts Hearing on H. 1064, the Youth PROMISE Act**

On Wednesday, July 15, Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security conducted a hearing regarding H. 1064, the Youth PROMISE Act (YPA). The hearing was attended by subcommittee members Louie Gohmert (R-TX), Maxine Waters (D-CA), and John Conyers (D-MI). The four representatives expressed varying levels of support for the YPA, which has bipartisan support in the House. Over 100 people were in attendance.

Five witnesses testified in support of the YPA: Los Angeles County Sheriff Leroy Baca; Marian Wright-Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund; Tracy Velázquez, Executive

Director of the Justice Policy Institute; Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Adjunct Professor at the Harvard School of Public Health; and David Muhlhausen, Senior Policy Analyst from the Heritage Foundation.

Chairman Scott and several of the witnesses emphasized the YPA's reliance on research-tested solutions to problems involving youth delinquency and gang involvement.

A webcast video of the hearing is available here: [http://judiciary.house.gov/hearings/hear\\_090715.html](http://judiciary.house.gov/hearings/hear_090715.html).

More information on the YPA is available on the CFYJ website at:

<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/promise.html>

or at Congressman Scott's website at:

[http://www.bobbyscott.house.gov/index.php?](http://www.bobbyscott.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=291&Itemid=86)

[option=com\\_content&view=article&id=291&Itemid=86](http://www.bobbyscott.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=291&Itemid=86).

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## RESEARCH & POLICY

### University of Texas Researchers Study Preadolescent Children Prosecuted as Adults

In the first-ever comprehensive look at the treatment of pre-adolescent children (primarily those age 12 and under) who commit serious crimes, researchers at The University of Texas at Austin found that 23 states allow children as young as age 7 to be prosecuted in adult court. The report, *From Time Out to Hard Time: Young Children in the Adult Criminal Justice System*, concludes that trying children as adults is a flawed policy inconsistent with evidence-based research. Yet, it points out, an alarming number of youth under the age of 12 are transferred to the adult criminal justice system.

Lead researcher Michele Deitch, an attorney, professor, and criminal justice expert at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, authored the report. "State policies allowing for the prosecution of children in adult court contradict the consensus of the most up-to-date scientific research," says Professor Deitch. "Children should be handled in the juvenile justice system where they can obtain the rehabilitative services and programs necessary to assist them in becoming productive adults. Lawmakers must reconsider and reverse these punitive laws."

On the Campaign's weekly online radio program, *Juvenile Justice Matters*, Professor Deitch explained how placing children in the adult criminal justice system contradicts the scientific consensus as well as best practices in public safety, fairness in the judicial process, social

expectations of young children, and global norms of juvenile justice.

Major findings of the report include:

- Every year, nearly 80 children age 13 and younger are judicially transferred to adult court. Between 1985 and 2004, 703 children age 12 and under and 961 children age 13 were judicially transferred to adult court. The total number of young children in adult criminal court actually is much higher than this, as the data does not include the number of children sent to the adult system through automatic transfer laws or laws allowing prosecutors to file cases directly in adult court.
- Many of these young children are being treated as adults for relatively minor offenses. There are almost as many youth treated as adults for property crimes as for crimes against persons. Determinations about when and whether a young child will be treated as an adult are marked by extreme arbitrariness, unpredictability and racial disparities.
- Four states--Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina--stand out as providing the worst possible outcomes for pre-adolescent offenders, given the combination of transfer policies and adult sentencing laws and practices in those states.
- On a single day in 2008, 7,703 children under age 18 were held in adult local jails and 3,650 in adult state prisons. In these adult facilities, the youth face vastly higher risks of physical and sexual assault and suicide than they would face in juvenile facilities. The youngest children are at particular risk.
- The United States is severely out of step with international law and practice. Most countries--including those Western nations most similar to the United States, countries in the developing world, Islamic nations, and even countries often considered to be human rights violators--repudiate the practice of trying young children as adults and giving them long sentences.

The report is available at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/news/story/856/>.

Listen to Professor Deitch on [\*Juvenile Justice Matters\*](#).

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## **Casey Foundation Releases 2009 Kids Count Databook**

On July 28, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released the 20th annual Kids Count Data Book, which is complemented by a new online and mobile-friendly Data Center that contains hundreds of measures of child well-being covering national, state, county, and city information. This year's Data Book essay calls for a "data revolution" that uses timely and reliable information to track the progress and improve the lives of vulnerable children.

With respect to juvenile justice data the essay recommends:

"[The] federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention should convene experts from across the country to develop a common set of performance measures, beginning with a uniform definition of recidivism for youth released from juvenile corrections facilities. Over time, common performance measures should be developed for community safety (helping all court-involved youth to avoid re-offending), and meaningful guidelines (with strict monitoring) should also be established for the safety and conditions of confinement for youth in custody.

In seeking to improve the quality and utilization of data in these and other systems, federal authorities should capitalize on their unique capacity to convene experts and to finance database development and research. They should play a catalytic role in forging consensus on high-priority performance indicators and crucial data collection needs. On issues of utmost importance, and for systems into which the federal government provides robust financial support, federal authorities should impose rules requiring stronger data collection and reporting, and they should insist that states employ common measures that allow for meaningful analysis and cross-state comparisons."

To obtain more information about the 2009 Kids Count Data Book visit: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/2009/Default.aspx>.

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## NATIONAL MOMENTUM



### Join the Movement!

CFYJ is excited to announce the upcoming launch of a new grassroots campaign called "Join the Movement"! To build momentum, the Join the Movement campaign will put grassroots organizing tools directly into the hands of youth, parents and families most directly affected by the punitive policies of trying, sentencing, and incarcerating youth in the adult justice system. The Join the Movement campaign will provide "Take Action" packets with new, exciting ideas for organizing; creative new outreach materials including an educational DVD, stickers, buttons, and bracelets; and web-based tools and tips for activating, motivating, and engaging others!

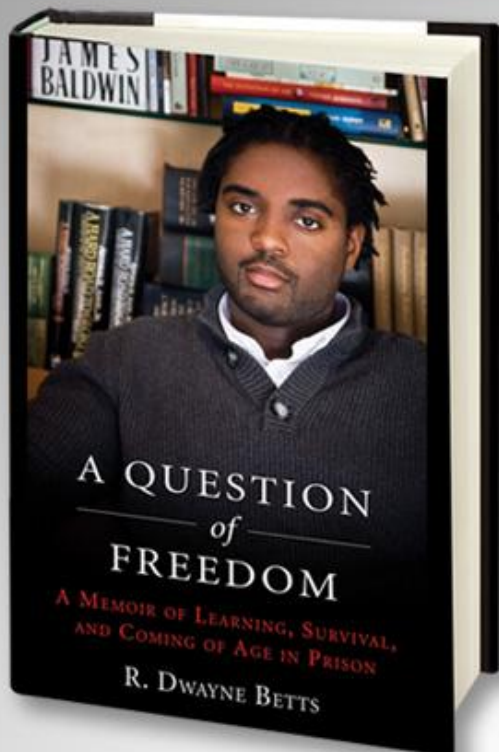
The movement launch event will be held:  
**Thursday, August 6**

6:30-9:00p.m.  
Public Welfare Foundation  
1200 U Street, NW, Washington, DC

The event will feature:

- Ways you can get involved!
- Take action kits with buttons, bracelets & more!
- Desserts & refreshments!

The Join the Movement launch will also celebrate the release of *A Question of Freedom*, the coming-of-age memoir about violence, freedom, crime, race, and the justice system by CFYJ spokesperson Dwayne Betts. be sure to get your signed copy August 6 at the Join the Movement launch.



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A YOUTH'S MISTAKE  
SHOULD **NOT EQUAL**  
A LIFETIME OF CONSEQUENCES.  
HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE

It's not often a youth finds himself in prison and in college—extraordinarily R. Dwayne Betts did both.

**A QUESTION OF FREEDOM** is much more than the average tale about the struggles of growing up in prison.

The Campaign for Youth Justice, Avery and R. Dwayne Betts challenge the stigma of juvenile imprisonment. Help prove to the world that mistakes can be redeemed, that everyone has the power to carve their own path.

Pre-order **A QUESTION OF FREEDOM** and take a stand on this important issue.

ON SALE 08.06.09



At the age of sixteen, R. Dwayne Betts carjacked a man with a friend. He had never held a gun before, but within a matter of minutes he had committed six felonies. A bright young kid, he

served his eight-year sentence as part of the adult population in some of the worst adult prisons in Virginia.

Meet Dwayne and hear his story! Attend one of Dwayne's book tour appearances around Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Dearborn, MI; New York, NY; Richmond, VA; Atlanta, GA; and Asheville and Raleigh, NC. Learn more about tour dates and times at:

<http://www.rdwaynebetts.com/appearances.html>

To attend the "Join the Movement" launch event, please RSVP to:

[organizer@cfyj.org](mailto:organizer@cfyj.org).

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## **Law Enforcement Officials Dialogue with Juvenile Justice Experts**

On Saturday, July 25, The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) hosted its annual conference, themed "NOBLE's Continuous Journey for Justice: Leading the Way through Action" in Norfolk, Virginia, at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott Hotel. The conference featured a panel of experts with a focus on the issue of racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system and the prosecution of youth in adult court. Expert panelists included Grace Bauer, Field Organizer for the Campaign for Youth Justice and parent of an incarcerated child; Dwayne Betts, poet and activist formerly incarcerated at age 16; Bart Lubow, Director of the Programs for High-Risk Youth at the Annie E. Casey Foundation; The Honorable Jerrauld C. Jones, Chief Judge, Norfolk Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court; and Sheriff Gabe Morgan of Newport News, Virginia and NOBLE "Host Committee" member.

Bart Lubow kicked off the panel by highlighting some of the themes in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2008 Kids Count Data Book Essay, "A Roadmap for Reform" including racial and ethnic disparities, over-reliance on detention and incarceration, poor conditions of confinement, and zero tolerance policies in school. Bart emphasized the need for juvenile justice systems to provide accurate and timely data, analyze decision-making points, and implement strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparities such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI).

Grace Bauer discussed the impact of incarceration on her family and the organizing efforts that she and other members of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) spearheaded to close Louisiana's worst youth prison, Tallulah. Grace recommended that communities be empowered to share their experiences and knowledge with other juvenile justice system stakeholders.

Dwayne Betts spoke about his personal experiences in the justice system and the barriers to education that he faced when he was released from prison. He recommended that participants

focus on increasing access to opportunities for young people and that adults become more active in the lives of our young people. Dwayne stressed the importance of books and reading for young people and talked about the book club he started, Young Men Read.

Judge Jones added his perspective on the enormous waste of taxpayer dollars on incarceration. He also discussed efforts such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), which improve positive outcomes for children. Judge Jones emphasized that efforts should be directed at keeping children out of the justice system.

Sherriff Morgan, who ran on a "prevention is cheaper than corrections" platform, stated unequivocally that children are not treated equally by the justice system and urged that professionals focus the discussion on what we are going to do about it. Sheriff Morgan spoke directly to the law enforcement officers present, telling them that they are in a position to influence and change racial and ethnic disparities in the system and prosecution of youth as adults and challenging them to use their power for system reform. Sherriff Morgan offered a number of solutions such as increasing community policing, expanding law enforcement relationships with communities, exercising more discretion on arrests, instituting civilian oversight boards for local law enforcement agencies, and starting mentoring programs for youth.

Law enforcement officials present at the workshop responded positively to the panel presentation and offered additional recommendations as to how they could be involved in juvenile justice reform efforts.

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## **NCLR Publicizes Latino Policy Brief at Annual Conference**

On July 25-28, The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) held its annual conference at McCormick Place West in Chicago, Illinois. The theme for this year's conference was "A New Era of Responsibility: Community Purpose." CFYJ Legislative Director Erin Davies spoke as an expert panelist at a workshop on the recent co-publication of NCLR and CFYJ, *America's Invisible Children: Latino Youth and the Failure of Justice*, which details how Latino youth are treated more harshly than white youth at all stages of the justice system, including higher rates of transfer to the adult criminal justice system. The panel was moderated by Dr. Juan Sanchez, Executive Director, Southwest Key Program and other panelists included Dr. Francisco "Chico" Villarruel, Director, Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University and Elias Elizondo, Activist, who was tried as an adult at age 16 and formerly sentenced to life without parole. The panel was extremely well-attended (standing room only!) and attendees learned about the injustice that currently exists for Latino youth in the juvenile and adult criminal justice system, heard Elias's testimony about his experience in the adult criminal justice system, and were given recommendations for how they could effect change at the state and federal level.

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## MEDIA WRAP



### **This Month on *Juvenile Justice Matters***

Listed below is the lineup of this month's new episodes of *Juvenile Justice Matters*, the CFYJ weekly radio show addressing the issue of trying youth as adults through the testimony of academics, advocates, and youth and families. The show is hosted weekly at 4:30 EDT on Thursdays through Blog Talk Radio at: [www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters). Don't forget to call in with questions to 347.843.4360.

July 30th: Michele Deitch is an attorney with over 23 years of experience working on criminal justice policy issues with state and local government officials, corrections officials, judges, and advocates. She teaches criminal justice and juvenile justice policy at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas and at the Law School. Her areas of specialty include independent oversight of correctional institutions, institutional reform litigation, prison conditions and management, prison and jail overcrowding, prison privatization, and juveniles in adult court. She discusses her new report, *From Time Out to Hard Time*.

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters/2009/07/30/Interview-with-Soros-Fellow-Attorney-and-Professor-Michele-Deitch>

July 24th: An interview with Kristin Rodine, Canyon-Country Reporter for *The Idaho Statesman*. Kristin joins us to discuss the automatic transfer of juveniles into the adult system for certain crimes in Idaho. She has been covering the case of Zachary Neagle, a 14-year-old being charged as an adult for the murder of his father, which has received national attention.

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters/2009/07/23/Interview-with-Idaho-advocate-Shaunna-Tucker-on-the-case-of-a-14-year-old-tried-as-an-adult>

July 16th: An interview with Professor Paul Butler, author of *Let's Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice* and a former D.C. prosecutor. Working for the Department of Justice, Professor Butler learned first-hand that the mass incarceration of predominantly minority communities is not the solution to fighting and reducing crime. Professor Butler argues that punishment is not always a deterrent and that incarceration is now often seen as a right of passage for young individuals. We discuss the implications of his arguments for juveniles and the criminal justice system itself.

<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters/2009/07/16/Interview-with-Professor-Paul-Butler-Author-and-Former-DC-Prosecutor>

July 9th: An interview Nashville advocate Clemmie Greenlee. From the time she was 12 until her

early 40s, Clemmie was consumed by a world of gangs, violence, drugs and prostitution, a major problem that plagues Nashville youth today. After the loss of her only son to gang violence, Clemmie completed a recovery program and began to work as an advocate for those struggling with life in the streets. She is now a Soros Fellow and runs a program called Galaxy Stars, an organization dedicated to intervening in the lives of young people and serving those in need. <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters/2009/07/09/Interview-with-Nashville-Advocates-Clemmie-Greenlee-and-Rodney-Britton>

July 2nd: Overhaul in Ohio: An Interview with Kim Brooks Tandy, the Executive Director and Founder of The Children's Law Center, Inc. and Al Gerhardstein, a civil rights attorney and President and Founder of the Ohio Justice and Policy Center. Sweeping changes to the juvenile justice system are taking place in Ohio, thanks to a federal class action first filed as a complaint against the Ohio Department of Youth Services in 2004 and resulting in a settlement in May 2008. Both of our guests served as members of the co-counsel in the case representing all the children who are or will be placed in Ohio's DYS custody. The provisions of the 2008 settlement included widespread reform, from an overhaul of the "culture" of DYS facilities to major changes in release practices. <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/jjmatters/2009/07/02/Overhaul-in-Ohio-A-talk-with-attorneys-Kim-Brooks-Tandy-and-Al-Gerhardstein-on-the-case-against-DYS>

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## GET ORGANIZED

A Monthly Column by Grace Bauer

### **National Parent Caucus Begins Monthly Phone Conferences**

On July 21, 2009, the Campaign began hosting the National Parent Caucus through conference calls. I am filled with excitement and anticipation of what this will mean for families across this nation affected by the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The response for the first call was overwhelming! We had (at best count) 25 folks on the call from all over the country, and at least 14 states were represented!

The idea for these calls came from the Campaign's Jessica Sandoval, and through support from the Campaign the calls seek to unite families and provide a learning environment to increase family involvement in the reform of the juvenile justice system and improve families' ability to advocate on behalf of their children. Judging from the incredible response, the need for this kind of family interaction is long overdue. The Campaign has long believed in the importance of having family and youth voices at the center of reform efforts, and this is just one more way we

are seeking to elevate those voices and provide support to the vast number of families affected.

The next call is scheduled for August 3, 2009 at 4:00 EDT. Please consider sharing with all who may have an interest. This is an opportunity to bring families and allies into the movement for a better juvenile justice system. For more information or for the call-in number for the conference call, please email Grace Bauer at:

[familiescantwait@yahoo.com](mailto:familiescantwait@yahoo.com)

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## VOICES

### **Michael, Nevada**

I was raised in a typical dysfunctional family that was both mentally and physically abusive, dominated by a father who had his own issues.

At the age of 14, I was arrested for a serious crime that involved my family. No matter any thoughts that I may have involving the treatment of youth in the adult criminal justice system, I have always remained culpable for my actions. Deep guilt brought on by a confused out-of-control child will be a cross I shall bear for life. That said, when the cold touch of those handcuffs wrapped around my wrists, I was no longer a child. I was now an adult expected to know and understand the adult criminal system, yet I was just a scared and lost kid afloat in a sea of strange faces and intimidating places. When asked a question, I was told that it would be best to answer. My Miranda rights were read to me, and I was told it would be best for me to waive them. So I did what the authority figure told me was best.

[I was] processed through the jail, fingerprinted, photographed, and forced to strip of my clothes in front of other adults going through their own tribulations.

The court was a world of its own, having a vernacular that people go to college to learn and understand, yet I was required to know and comprehend it as clearly as those who earned law degrees. Lost and confused with every aspect of every court hearing that I attended, my life raft was a public defender I had no choice but to trust.

So at the most crucial part of my young life I was given a choice by my public defender: either take it to trial and receive at least 60 years in prison, or take a plea agreement and go to prison for 20 years to life. I was scared by either prospect, but the public defender was quick to remind me that I was guilty, to take the deal, [that it was] for the best. Once again I followed [an] authority figure's advice. I was emotionally shattered. [I had] no family to glean any advice from, just a source of guilt that followed my willingness to be sentenced to life in prison. Whisked away

never to be seen by the world again. A child treated as an adult, only too eager to crawl into a hole and fade away.

I didn't know that I would be going to prison, a place that houses nothing but predators. I was not prepared at 14 to survive that type of environment but was plopped down into the center of it like a fox into a den of wolves. For my own personal security I will not go into detail about my prison experiences.

But it was not all negative....Even though life has passed me by before I gave myself a chance to experience it, I did manage to get my high school diploma and hold onto the hope that one day I can rewrite the story of my wasted life.

The justice system could possibly be best served by treating youths on individual cases. Maturity levels are never more varied than when you are dealing with teenagers. Consider the mental state of youths as they are going through pubescent changes. No matter the charges, from minor to serious, a youth should be held to a separate standard from that of an adult who is better able to grasp the world around [him]. [It would be better] to recognize youths as youths lacking a full foundation, to evaluate youths separately, to greater understand whether or not these youths are worthy of the adult criminal system or can be turned around with the skill of those qualified in the juvenile court system.

To share your story of being a youth in the adult justice system, go to: <http://www.campaign4youthjustice.org/yourstory.html>.

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## ON THE CALENDAR

**August 6, 6:30-8:30, Public Welfare Foundation, 1200 U St., NW, Washington, DC**

Release of Dwayne Betts' Memoir, *A Question of Freedom*, and launch of CFYJ's "Join the Movement" grassroots campaign. Save the date for this event to celebrate the release of this memoir of learning, survival, and coming of age in an adult prison and the launch of CFYJ's Join the Movement Campaign. RSVP to:

[organizer@cfyj.org](mailto:organizer@cfyj.org).

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## WELCOME TO CFYJ!!

### **The Campaign for Youth Justice Welcomes Three New Members to Our Board of Directors!**

The Campaign is proud to announce that Carrie Blewitt, Laura Hankins and Tyrone Parker have recently joined our Board of Directors. These three outstanding individuals bring tremendous expertise in communications, policy and advocacy to our organization.

Carrie Blewitt is the Managing Director of Qorvis Communications. Carrie is a communications professional with sixteen years of experience in public relations agencies and television newsrooms and has expertise in corporate communications, news gathering, media relations, event management and non-profit PR.

Laura Hankins is Special Counsel to the Director of the Public Defender Service (PDS) of the District of Columbia. Laura represents PDS in commenting on legislation before the D.C. City Council. She also represents PDS on the District of Columbia Sentencing Commission and on the committee responsible for drafting the District's pattern criminal jury instructions.

Tyrone Parker is the Founder & President of the Alliance of Concerned Men. In 1991, Tyrone founded the Alliance of Concerned Men, a community-based non-profit organization that provides outreach, prevention, intervention, social services, cultural enrichment, and recreational activities for low-income, at-risks youths and families in the District of Columbia. Tyrone was recently featured on National Public Radio about his work in "Walking Wise Men Target At-Risk Youth."

The Campaign thanks Karen Dingfelder for serving on the board for the past three years and wishes her many happy adventures in her travels now that she has retired from PriceWaterhouseCoopers and is stepping down from the board.

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*Encourage* your Senator or Representative to support the [Youth PROMISE Act](#).

*Listen* to [Juvenile Justice Matters](#) radio show Thursdays at 4:30pm.m EDT.

*Call in* to the show with your questions at (347) 843-4360.

*Join* the Campaign for Youth Justice group on Facebook and connect with hundreds of advocates across the country at:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=22937084155&ref=ts>.

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<http://www.youtube.com/user/jjreform>.

*Read* *JJ Today*, Youth Today's blog on juvenile justice at:

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