

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Media Guide

2010

Prepared by the Campaign for Youth Justice

Campaign for Youth Justice
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Dear Youth Advocate:

Congratulations! You've decided to get involved with the Campaign for Youth Justice!

The Campaign for Youth Justice seeks to raise awareness about the impact of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal justice system. The Campaign for Youth Justice believes that youth deserve a second chance, and should not be tried and incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system.

In taking action, you will be joined by many other people throughout the country in sharing your views on the impact of state policies of trying and sentencing children as adults and why the laws needs to be re-examined.

This guide contains:

- Basic info on the media
- Information on working with the media
- 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. Sincerely,



Eric Solomon
Director of Media Relations
Campaign for Youth Justice

Table of Contents

What Reporters Look For	4
Planning a Media Hit	6
Pitching Stories to the Media	8
Writing Media Materials	10
Sample Timeline for a Media Hit	14
Who's Who in the Media	16
Ten Tips for Effective Interviews	18
Sample Press Advisory	20
Sample Press Release for an Event	22
Sample Editorial Board Letter	25
Sample Editorial Opinion	27
Sample Letter to the Editor	29
Samples of Personal Stories	31
Sample Talking Points	33
Sample Fact Sheet	35

What Reporters Look For

From school shootings to murder cases, media coverage of juvenile crime tends to focus on the sensational. Blow-by-blow accounts of a few violent crimes fuel the perception that our nation's youth are "super-predators" and that the juvenile justice system is not equipped to deal with today's youth.

The way the media covers crime could make us toss up our hands in despair. Instead, we must engage the media at their own game. That is why the Campaign for Youth Justice works to generate media coverage that tells another story: how youth in the adult criminal justice system could be better served in the juvenile justice system, where they would be more likely to receive rehabilitation and receive a second chance to succeed in life.

The most important lesson we have learned is to work with the media. To do that effectively, we need to think like the media. That means figuring out what editors look for when they decide whether to cover a story, and handing reporters the elements they need to write that story quickly.

What do reporters and editors look for when they decide what to cover?

- **Compelling human stories:** Personal stories, not broad analyses are the way most people begin to understand an issue. Reporters often want an individual story to hook an audience, so try to make one or two personal stories of youth who have turned their lives around and the impact of incarceration on a youth's life a centerpiece of your media work.
- **Unusual alliances:** The more unusual your alliances, the more likely you are to make news, so if you're going to hold a press conference, think about who else you could invite to join you.
- **Celebrity power:** The media love celebrities. If there is a celebrity in the area who might come out and support your effort at a public event, invite them to join you.
- **New facts and figures:** Reports that help us understand the world we live in are a staple of news coverage. Releasing new facts and figures can be a great tool for generating media. Check out the Campaign for Youth Justice's website for key facts and figures and suggestions on where to find help in your state.
- **The first, the biggest, the most original:** Reporters get press advisories about protests, rallies, and other events every single day. If you want yours to stand out, try to show reporters that your event is the first of its kind, has an unprecedented level of support and is bigger or more original than anything else going on in your community that day.

- **Compelling visuals:** Sometimes a picture tells a story better than words. A strong visual angle can get photographers and TV cameras to cover an event that would have otherwise not been assigned to a reporter. For example, hold a press conference outside of an adult jail, or on the steps of a courthouse.
- **Youth:** Adults are fascinated by what makes youth tick. Reporters often show interest in stories about young people making positive statements and taking action about the things they care about.
- **Local angles; national trends:** Reporters in the regional bureaus of national papers seek out local stories that illuminate national trends. Reporters at local papers love stories that compare their region to others. Highlighting how your juvenile justice programs can mesh with or buck a national trend, or how they compare with other jurisdictions can build the news value of your event.

Planning a Media Hit

- **Set a Goal**

Why are you planning the media hit? Set a clear goal you are working toward, and always make sure you are working toward it.

- **Determine your target audience**

Usually, you will be targeting key decision makers. You will want to target specific news outlets that will reach those individuals. Take other factors into account when determining when/where/how you will do the media hit. Will you target local, community papers, or larger news agencies? Is your event in a highly populated enough area to receive adequate public attention? Is the legislature in session while you perform the hit? All of these questions must be considered.

- **Pick a good time, date and place**

If you want media to come to an event, plan it for the morning, from 10:00am to 12:00 noon on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday morning. That way reporters can interview your spokespersons, write their stories and file before deadline. You cannot predict earthquakes or fires, but you can check that the date you choose does not clash with a presidential visit or other big local event. Make sure the location you choose is appropriate, accessible, and will not take long for reporters to get to.

- **Decide what kind of media exposure you want**

There are so many different ways to increase media exposure: Press releases, pitching the story well, good spokespersons, radio newscasts, and press conferences can all increase media exposure of a particular issue. Make sure you prioritize your methods of exposure in such a way that you receive as much as possible.

- **Plan ahead**

At least ten weeks before your event is set to take place, write a media outreach plan that sets firm deadlines, and stick to them. That way, you will not be caught in crisis mode right before your event takes place. The sample timeline in this kit is designed to help you develop your plan.

- **Develop a clear message and stay on it**

Ask yourself: what is the one-sentence message that you want the public to take away when they open their newspaper and read about your event? Once you determine the message, stay on message. Make sure the message is hammered home in all your materials, in every interview you give and in the character of your media event itself.

- **Decide who to take your story to**

Look at the various sources of the media, including local and national papers, magazines, radio and TV so you know what kind of stories get what kind of coverage. Identify outlets and columnists who are sympathetic to youth, and reporters who have good written stories in the past. Build good lists of reporters you want to pitch.

- **Get your event listed**

The Associated Press runs a daybook which tells local media what is going on in their area, and it is essential to get your event listed there the day before it happens (Check local phone listings for the local Associated Press office.) Most metropolitan regions also have a local wire service for the same purpose. Be sure to fax over your media advisory to all the local daybooks at least a couple days in advance and call to make sure your event gets listed.

- **Select and train your spokespersons**

There are several kinds of great spokespersons: researchers, experts and people who have compelling personal stories to tell. Ideally, you want several of each. They should be articulate, able to say what they need to in a few sentences, funny (if possible), outspoken and qualified. They should know the issue well, but most importantly, they should be prepared. Work with your spokespersons ahead of time, provide them with talking points, and practice with them to make sure they stay on the message.

- **Send clear press materials**

Hundreds of press releases and press packets arrive in newsrooms everyday and you need to make yours stand out. When you mail packets or fax your release, make sure your headlines are big, clear, and communicate why your event is the most newsworthy one in the region that day. Email and calling are the best ways to contact reporters

- **Make the reporter's job as easy as possible**

Most reporters are overworked and some have to file several stories in one day. Provide them with everything they need to write the story, including spokespersons with phone numbers, statistics, fact sheets, background articles, bios of spokespersons, etc. Email the information right away. If they call you, drop everything and talk to them.

- **Follow-up phone calls**

Reporters do not mind if you call them back. In fact, some of them like it. Pitch the story on voice mail. Leave messages. Call back the next day if they do not call you. Be persistent. Remember, they need you as much as you need them.

- **Make sure spokespersons are available**

Reporters often want to interview spokespersons when following up on a pitch. Know where you can reach your spokespersons at all times, and on the day of the event, make sure they carry a cellphone, and know to expect press calls.

- **Pitch a follow-up story**

Actions and rallies are important, but usually disappear after one day. Try to set up constant hits (e.g. Monday is a press release, Tuesday is a public rally, Wednesday a celebrity gives an exclusive story to the local paper, Thursday is an Op-Ed piece, and the weekend is an editorial). That way you'll have a bigger, longer-lasting impact.

Pitching Stories to the Media

When most people think of public relations, they think of writing press releases, op-eds and letters. Those are important skills, but one thing that's critical to an effective public relations campaign is pitching your story to reporters.

In a busy newsroom, your press release might fly out of the fax machine or mail, get buried under a stack of paper and never reach the right reporter, and even if it does that is no guarantee that he/she will actually look at it. Unless you call to follow up, you will never know. That means you probably will not take the story to another reporter who might be looking for a story like yours.

Pitching helps us figure out all those things, and learn which angles excite the reporters. One reporter might love facts and figures, while another needs human interest to get going. Some outlets need super-local angles, while others want hooks to pending legislation. Calling reporters, columnists, editors and producers helps you learn what individual reporters want and need, and helps you build the personal relationships key to placing stories.

Here are some pointers for how to go about pitching a story:

- **Rehearse your pitch with friends or colleagues before you start.** Writing it down is not enough. You do not want it to sound too scripted.
- **Know your reporter's specific interest.** Research past articles or issues that the reporter has covered and their relevance to the issue at hand.
- **Think before you pitch.** Is there a specific angle that this reporter might be interested in? If so, incorporate it into your call
- **Pitch in the morning when reporters are at their desks and hungry for news.** By 1:00pm they are out on stories, and by 5:00pm they are on deadline.
- **If you get a reporter on the phone, introduce yourself and ask if they have a minute to talk.** If they say no, ask when it would be a good time to call back. If they say yes, give them your pitch.
- **When you get a reporter's attention, cut to the chase.** Don't bother asking if they received your fax. Tell them what you are calling about and get into the pitch right away.
- **Engage the reporter in conversation.** Throw out some questions. "Are you still following the state's juvenile justice programs?" "Have you heard the Governor is talking about sending youths to adult court?" Listen to feedback and ask the reporter directly if they are interested in your story. If they say yes, set up an interview time right away. If they say no, ask why.
- **If the reporter you have targeted is too busy to do your story, ask who else you should take it to.** If they think it is a good story, they will give you a name or two. If they do not think it is a good story, find out why. If one reporter turns you down, do not be put off. Go back to the assignment desk and see if there is another reporter who might cover it.

- **If you get a voice-mail, leave a message.** Make sure to leave your number slowly and clearly. Make regular follow-up calls until you get the reporter on the phone. If you cannot get them in person, leave a second message a couple of days later. Do not leave more than two messages on voice-mail.
- **Keep detailed notes of who you called and what they said and use your notes when you follow up.** When you call several reporters in a day it is surprisingly easy to forget who you spoke to.
- **When you get a reporter interested, seal the deal.** Schedule an interview and then confirm their participation at your event.
- **Do not forget to follow up.** Check with reporters who have expressed interest right before your event takes place. A reporter who says they are interested might be put on another story at the last minute, leaving you to pitch your story to the assignment desk all over again. Or, a reporter may simply forget your event if they are not called and reminded.
- **Always say “thank you.”** Reporters receive pitch calls all the time, but it is surprising how few people thank a reporter who did a good job. A quick call to say thank you is good manners, and it will make a reporter more willing to take your call next time.
- **Smile when you pitch.** If you sound bored when you pitch, the reporter will switch off. Communicate your enthusiasm and passion for the story when you pitch.

Writing Media Materials

This guide will help to produce effective media materials to help achieve the intended result. Feel free to refer to these descriptions and the examples at the end of the packet as you compile your own.

1. Media Advisory

A media advisory is quick, clear, and no more than a page. It is designed to draw reporters to an event or give them a heads-up about an upcoming news story. A media advisory is ideal, for example, when you want to let reporters know about a rally or press conference, or if you want to spark interest in a new report or a big news story without giving away the details before you are ready. Make sure to send the media advisory out several days in advance, and make sure that all dates of embargo are clear when releasing it to a known reporter in advance.

A media advisory usually includes:

- “Media advisory” and the date.
- Name and number of key contacts.
- Dateline (which city and state the news is being released from).
- Catchy headline.
- Five Ws (who, what, where, when, and why).
- One or two explanatory paragraphs.
- ### or -30- to indicate the end of the advisory.

2. Press Release

While media advisories give the bare-bones information, a press release tells the reporters what the story is. It is a short version of the dream story you would like to see appear in print. Because it is written like a news story, the bulk of the text should sound objective, with all facts, figures, and statements of opinion carefully attributed.

Press releases expand out in the “inverted pyramid” style, with the first paragraph giving the big picture, and each paragraph that follows providing more details. Send out the day of your event. Have copies available at the event and posted on your website. Make sure that someone is at the office answering the phones and has a copy of the press release along with all the cellular telephone numbers of anyone authorized to talk with the media. That way, the media can stay in touch. If this is not possible, leave a voice message with one or two contacts’ cellular telephone numbers for media calls.

Key elements to include:

- Contact names and numbers
- Date of release
- Headlines and sub-headlines that spell out what makes this news
- Dateline (what city and state the news is being released from)
- First paragraph that includes key details (what, when, where, why, and who)
- Pithy quote from your key spokesperson. This gives you a chance to articulate your message clearly and gives reporters a quote they can use.
- “Nut paragraph” that gives background information that is essential to the story (e.g. The minimum age to transfer juveniles to adult court was signed into law In (your state) on (date))
- Description of the organization that’s issuing the news (e.g. CFYJ is a group trying to keep youth out of the adult system nationally).
- Press releases should be one or two pages long. At the end of the page, write – more- if there is more, or ### or -30- to indicate the end.

3. Editorial Board Letter/Memo

Editorials, which usually appear on the left-hand side of the op-ed page, are where the newspaper editors weigh in on pressing issues and are a powerful way to reach public and opinion leaders. To secure an editorial in your local newspaper, the first step is to send an email to or call the editor of the editorial board.

Start by introducing yourself and explain your campaign, as you want the newspaper to editorialize in support of your campaign’s goals. Finish by proposing a meeting to discuss the issues you have raised and promise to call to follow up.

4. Opinion Editorial

Getting an op-ed published in a local paper is a terrific way to communicate your message relating to a specific event. Also, they are used to bring attention to new data or legislation introduced. But it is not always easy to get your op-ed printed, so here are a few tips to help you along.

Most op-ed editors look for pieces that are 500 to 700 words, timely, relevant, original, and engaging. They look for local authors who have personal or professional expertise on the subject.

For your campaign, it is essential that you strategically target who your ‘messenger’ ought to be and what agents will be best. For example, you are targeting your county executive to stop allowing youth to be placed in adult jail. Who does the county executive listen to? Is he/she a member of a faith community? If so, see if you can get a pastor in that community to author the op-ed.

If you are writing an op-ed:

Do

- Make one clear argument. Be provocative, be punchy, and write what you think.
- Make it relevant. Show why this issue is topical, and how it affects your region.
- Use personal anecdotes and real-life stories to bring your story to life.
- Include a few facts and figures to support your point.
- Observe the requirements of the newspaper. Give the paper a call before you submit your piece to check how long the op-ed should be, who you should send it to and any other requirements they may have.

Don't

- Beat around the bush with lengthy introductions.
- Sit on the fence. An op-ed is about opinion, so say what you think.
- Preach, rail, or make sweeping statements you cannot back up.
- Ramble. Read over your work to make sure it is concise and clear.
- Submit a piece with typos, grammatical errors, or no contact information.

5. Letter to the Editor

Relate your letter to something recently discussed in the publication to which you are writing. Discuss the problem trying youth as adults and present solutions to the problem. If your letter is going to be shortened, it will usually be the final paragraphs, so don't save your point for the end. Get right into your point immediately. You have a better chance placing a letter to the editor than an op-ed.

Write clearly and concisely following the limitations usually given on the editorial page or letters-to-the-editor page. Publications rarely edit and, instead, select well-written and grammatically correct letters. Make it easy to publish yours.

Sign your name and include your phone number and address if required.

E-mail your letter to the address listed for the publication. Some outlets may have you submit your letter on their website.

Keep in mind that most publications verify by phone or in writing that you, and not someone attributing these opinions to you, authored the letter.

6. Fact Sheets, FAQs, Case Studies and other background materials.

Because reporters are so busy, minimize their work by giving them all the information they need. Offering well-researched, thorough and compelling materials makes it more likely that reporters will write the kind of story you want to see. Possible background materials include:

- Case Studies
- Local history
- Local facts and figures

Sample Timeline for a Media Hit

In an ideal world, you will be able to plan your event several weeks in advance and cover every base, but that is not always possible. With hard work and a little luck, you can pull off a terrific press event in as little as a week's notice. If you do have the time to plan far ahead, this is a basic guideline of what you should be thinking about and when.

10 weeks before the event

- Plan and schedule the event or activity
- Write up your first media plan
- Develop your message

8 weeks before the event

- Select spokespersons and firm up logistical arrangements
- Write media materials

6 weeks before the event

- Develop talking points and train spokespersons
- Create lists of reporters to target
- Write and send your op-ed to the op-ed editor

4 weeks before the event

- Finalize press releases, editorial board letters and other materials
- Send materials and make initial pitch calls to publications and columnists

2 weeks before the event

- Mail press packets to daily news reporters, producers and editors
- Make first round of follow up-calls
- Send editorial board letter requesting a meeting and follow up

1 week before the event

- Continue making follow up calls and “digging” to find the right reporter
- Send materials to reporters who request them
- Make sure all spokespersons are prepared for the event and have cell phones with them on the day.
- Make sure you have extra press packets to take to the event
- Send media advisories to local daybooks

A few days before the event

- Make another round of pitch calls
- Check in with spokespersons and do a run-through if possible
- Check to make sure your event is listed in local daybooks
- Email your advisory or press release to all relevant outlets

Day of the event

- First thing in the morning, call back any reporters who have expressed interest as well as all the local TV and radio outlets
- Make sure you have a designated person to welcome media to the event. Ask all reporters to sign in and hand them press packets
- Return any calls from reporters immediately and make sure you and your spokespersons are contactable at all times
- Ask reporters when their pieces will run and get good copies of all the stories you appear in

Who's Who in the Media?

- **Assignment Editor / Metro Editor**

Newspaper, television, and radio newsrooms have assignment editors on duty all the time. That person is responsible for sifting through all the news coming into a newsroom and determining who covers which stories. If you are not sure which reporter to pitch, the assignment desk is the place to start. Some newspapers also have metro editors who deal with local news.

- **Planning Editor**

For stories with a longer lead, most television newsrooms have a planning editor who decides which stories to follow up on.

- **Bureau Chief / Correspondent**

National publications have reporters scattered around the country. Getting to know your local correspondents and bureau chiefs can help get your stories on the national news.

- **Wire Services**

Associated Press, Reuters, and other wire services are essential outlets to pitch because one story that goes out on the wire may show up in hundreds of papers around the country.

- **Daybook**

This is a service provided by AP and other wire services in most media markets. It lists the media events going on in the region each day.

- **General Assignment (GA) Reporter**

A 'floating' reporter in the newsroom who is assigned news stories on a daily basis by the assignment editor.

- **Beat Reporter**

A reporter who focuses on one issue, such as education, the environment, or crime. Beat reporters usually have some expertise in or specialist knowledge of the subject they cover.

- **Editorial Board**

The top editors of the paper who convene weekly to discuss which issues the newspaper should take a stance on, and what they should say. The editor with the most expertise on an issue is usually dispatched to write the editorial.

- **Op-ed Editor**

Hundreds of people submit non-solicited opinion editorials each week. The op-ed editor decides which ones will run, and works with the author to edit the piece.

- **Columnist**

Newspaper columnists give their take on current events. They are easily recognizable because their photograph usually accompanies their column. While some columnists seek strong human interest stories, others prefer hard political commentary.

- **Producer**

Television and radio shows all have producers (national TV and radio shows have hundreds) who research stories, decide on who to interview and do all the behind-the-scenes work to get a story on the air.

- **Photo Editor**

Wire services and newspapers all have photo editors. If you have a story with a compelling visual angle, it is sometimes worth pitching the photo editor directly.

Ten Tips for Effective Interviews

1. Be prepared

Before the interview, set aside a few minutes to think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Ask a friend or colleague to fire questions at you, and rehearse your answers out loud.

2. Watch what you wear

Wear dark, plain colors; avoid stripes and busy patterns. When being interviewed on camera, a simple rule of thumb is to never wear white.

3. Use personal stories to bring the issue to life

Do not just tell reporters why you think a program is a success. Tell stories about specific youth who have turned their lives around. If you are discussing why certain aspects of the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems do not work, give concrete examples.

4. Provide a few facts and figures to support your point

While you don't want to overwhelm reporters with numbers, do try to have a couple of key facts and figures at your fingertips and use them to support your argument.

5. Reiterate your main point clearly

Make sure you articulate your main message clearly and do not be afraid to say it again and again. The more times you get your key point across, better people will remember it.

6. Do not get trapped into talking about things you do not know about

If you do not know the answer to a question, bring it back to something you do know. If they ask, for example, what you think about a new piece of federal legislation, you could say: *“Well, I don't know the specifics of that bill, but what I can tell you is that in my x years of experience with juvenile justice, what's most effective is...”*

7. Tailor what you say to your audience

Are you talking to a TV news reporter who wants a speedy sound bite, a legal reporter who knows the ins and the outs of the system, or a beat reporter who wants an in-depth story about one program? Is the audience local or national? Think about who you are talking to and tailor what you say accordingly.

8. Get to know the reporter

Reporters are human too, and how a story turns out is as much about the interviewer as the interviewee. Ask them what their story is focusing on and what they plan to ask you.

9. You do not have to answer reporters' questions directly

Decide in advance what it is that you want to communicate and steer the conversation back to that point, e.g., *“You know, I think the real question here is should we be investing more money in prisons or should we focus on more effective juvenile justice programs?”*

10. Take your time

Do not rush into answering a question you feel uncomfortable with. Remember: there is no such thing as “off the record.” Watch your words, and do not say anything that you do not want to see in a story. Speak slowly, ask for clarification if you need it, and prepare yourself with a couple of space fillers, e.g. *“That is a really important question, Jim, and it gets right to the heart of the issue.”*

Above all relax, smile, and be yourself! Even though you are talking about serious issues, the more relaxed you look the more credible you will appear to the audience, and the more likely you are to be asked back. Smile, make eye contact, and above all have fun. If you are being interviewed on camera, make sure you look at the interviewer instead of the camera.

Sample Press Advisory

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

**For Immediate Release
July 10, 2008**

**Contact: Eric Solomon
Campaign for Youth Justice
(202) 558-3580 (ext. 20)**

****MEDIA ADVISORY****

**Experts to Recommend Removal of Youth from D.C. Jail
*Release of New Study at DOC Public Roundtable***

WHAT: The D.C. City Council is holding a public roundtable on youth incarcerated at the D.C. Jail. During the hearing, experts will testify for reform of D.C. laws regarding trying youth as adults and placing them in adult jails. The Fenty Administration will also release a report with new information on the status of the youth at the D.C. Jail, as required by the 2008 budget approved by the D.C. Council.

WHO: Liz Ryan, President and CEO
Campaign for Youth Justice

Others experts will be on hand

WHEN: July 14, 2008
2:00 p.m.

WHERE: Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
Room 500
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
<http://www.dccouncil.us/>

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.

For more information, visit: www.campaignforyouthjustice.org.

Sample Press Release for an Event



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

**For Immediate Release
July 14, 2008**

**Contact: Eric Solomon
Campaign for Youth Justice
(202) 558-3580 (office)
(202) 253-5557 (cell)**

**Experts Recommend Removal of Youth from D.C. Jail with Release
of New Study at DOC Public Roundtable**

Washington, D.C. – Today, the D.C. City Council held a public roundtable on youth incarcerated at the D.C. Jail, in which experts testified for the reform of trying youth as adults and placing them in adult jails. The Fenty Administration released a report with new information on the status of the youth at the D.C. Jail, as required by the 2008 budget approved by the D.C. Council. Witnesses included Liz Ryan, President and CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ).

“The report released to the Council today by the Fenty Administration provides an important update on the status of the youth at the D.C. Jail and underscores the need to remove youth from the D.C. Jail as soon as possible,” said Ryan. “Too many youth are being prosecuted as adults in the District without review by a judge and the District’s law must be reversed, to allow for a hearing and a judge’s decision, on whether to prosecute youth in adult court. Jurisdictions around the country have already begun making essential changes to state laws to reduce the number of youth prosecuted in adult court and our Nation’s Capital can act as a leader in implementing these reforms.”

Highlights of the “Report on Youth in the Adult Jail” are:

- The data shows that all (or nearly all) of the youth held at the D.C. Jail are youth of color;
- Most of the youth at the jail are not charged with FBI “index crimes”, considered to be the most serious offenses;
- The data shows that only slightly more than half the youth held at the jail had a finding of guilt, suggesting a serious re-examination of the prosecution of youth in the adult criminal justice system.

Advocates, community groups, and attorneys called on Mayor Adrian Fenty to:

- Continue to invest in effective approaches in the juvenile justice system.
- Reduce the transfer of youth to the adult court by requiring that all transfer cases be decided by a judge, with a hearing and criteria for consideration.
- End the placement of youth in the D.C. jail as soon as possible.
- Collect and analyze data on youth tried and sentenced as adults on an on-going basis.

-more-

Under current law, youth in the D.C. Jail will not have access to the rehabilitative services put into place under new comprehensive reform legislation, the Omnibus Juvenile Justice Amendment Act of 2004 (D.C. Law 15-261) and cannot be returned to the juvenile justice system even if they could benefit from these rehabilitative services.

The “Report on Youth in the Adult Jail” references research that shows that prosecuting youth as adults increases violence and risk of re-offending and that placing youth in adult jails puts youth at serious risk of harm. According to a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Task Force, in a November, 2007 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, youth who are prosecuted as adults are, on average, 34 percent more likely to commit crimes than youth retained in the juvenile justice system. The U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics documents that 21 percent and 13 percent of all substantiated victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence in jails in 2005 and 2006 respectively, were youth under the age of 18, even though only 1 percent of jail inmates are juveniles.

In the District, male youth are placed in a separate section of the D.C. Jail. However, *Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America*, a report released by the Campaign for Youth Justice in November, 2007, shows that while separating children from adults in adult jails will reduce contact with adults, children are then often placed in isolation, which can also produce harmful consequences.

Youth are frequently locked down 23 hours a day in small cells with no natural light. These conditions can cause anxiety, paranoia, and exacerbate existing mental disorders and put youth at risk of suicide. *Jailing Juveniles* documents that youth have the highest suicide rates of all inmates in jails. Youth are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility, and 20 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than youth in the general population.

The District’s juvenile justice system is a national model that can be an effective alternative to prosecuting youth in adult court and is strongly supported by public opinion polling. In 2001, the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Commission recommended the closure of the Oak Hill facility, investment in community-based alternatives to incarceration, and revising the juvenile justice laws to allow for transfer to adult court only after a hearing and a decision by a juvenile court judge. The Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) was later established to reform D.C.’s juvenile justice system.

DYRS is constructing a new facility to replace Oak Hill with a smaller, home-like facility for the few youth who may need to be incarcerated for some period of time and more community-based alternatives to incarceration for the majority of youth who do not pose a risk to public safety. These reforms are based on best practices around the country that include the Missouri “approach” to juvenile corrections, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, and model community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration. The reforms are working to reduce the city’s reliance on incarceration as a response to juvenile crime.

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.

For more information, visit: www.campaignforyouthjustice.org.

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Sample Editorial Board Letter

[Date]
[Address]

Dear _____,

On behalf of [insert your organization's name], we are pleased share with you the results of a recent public opinion poll, conducted by Zogby International, re-voter attitudes about the justice system. We'd like to discuss the poll and its implications for justice policy in [your state] at your earliest convenience.

The poll results show that the public overwhelmingly supports investing in rehabilitation and treatment rather than locking youth up in adult jails and prisons. Some of the key findings of the enclosed report are:

- 72% of respondents believe putting youth in adult correctional facilities makes them more likely to commit future crimes;
- 68% of respondents believe persons under age 18 should not be incarcerated in jails and prisons that hold adults;
- 95% of respondents believe increasing education and job skills training for youth in the juvenile system will help reduce crime.

Every year as many as 200,000 youth under 18 are prosecuted in adult criminal courts across the United States and in [your state], [insert state number] of youth are tried, sentenced or incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system. Despite overwhelming research demonstrating that these policies have failed, our state's laws to prosecute youth in the adult criminal justice system remain on the books.

We will be in touch with you to follow up. In the meantime, please feel free to contact [insert name] at [insert phone number] or [insert name] at [insert phone number].

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your name, phone number, and address]

Sample Editorial Opinion

Bill Provides Comprehensive Support for Young People in the Juvenile System
Bill Schuffenhauer- Olympic Silver Medalist
Utah Standard-Examiner
August 6, 2008

Millions of Americans will watch the upcoming Olympic Games, not only to see American athletes win international fame and recognition, but also to hear the stories of those athletes, whose struggles and perseverance will be rewarded on the winners' podiums. We watch the Olympics to marvel at the capabilities of the human body, but also at those of the mind, which fights through hardship and turmoil, and revels in victory and recognition. Athletes doggedly push to reach the pinnacle that is Olympic competition, but some climb mountains that involve more than just physical and mental training.

My silver medal as a member of the U.S. Bobsled team in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City was the peak of my figurative mountain. I was born to a heroin-addicted mother and never knew my father, spending my childhood bouncing from one foster family to another.

I drank and used drugs, introduced to me by my mother and stepfather, at an age when I should have been playing with schoolmates at recess. I skipped school, I went hungry, I stole and I ended up in juvenile detention. Eventually, I discovered sports in middle school and, through a combination of hard work and luck, managed to become what I am today.

Stories like mine, however, are few and far between.

Children who come from backgrounds like mine usually have grimmer life outcomes. They can become involved with alcohol and drugs, engage in serious delinquent behavior, or end up in gangs, committing more serious crimes. These youth often come from histories of neglect, abuse or both. Some have diagnosable mental health conditions that are serious factors contributing to their delinquent behavior.

Society's response to these young people is overwhelmingly punitive. They can be transferred to adult court, where they may be held in adult jails pre-trial and sentenced to adult prison time.

In Utah, there is no age limit for detaining a juvenile in adult jail pre-trial, though our state does better than some by requiring juveniles to be separated from adults while they are in jail. Had I not made certain decisions, I could have been one of those young people behind bars.

States with overly punitive approaches, however, do not help youth with troubled histories turn their lives around. They stigmatize young people and, especially for youth detained in adult facilities, turn them into hardened criminals more likely to commit serious crimes in the future.

Fortunately, there is legislation currently pending in the U.S. Senate that would help states to improve our juvenile justice systems and increase public safety, by working to keep kids out of adult jails and prisons and providing more effective alternatives in the juvenile justice system. S3155, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2008, will make serious improvements to the juvenile justice system in all states.

The bill promotes comprehensive supports for youth in the juvenile justice system, including alternatives to detention and incarceration, and assessment for mental health and substance abuse.

It would also reduce barriers to states that maintain and keep youth convicted in adult court to remain in juvenile facilities, by not withholding federal money to states that employ this method, and require states to take tangible steps to reduce the disproportionate contact youth of color have with the juvenile justice system.

Taking these steps will improve the lives of youth in the system while better preventing them from offending again, and I am hopeful that Sen. Orrin Hatch, as a member of the Judiciary Committee, will co-sponsor and vote for this important legislation to better serve the youth and the public of Utah.

Young people in these situations need effective supports that will help them turn their lives around. Rehabilitation is a real goal for these young people; the approach we take toward them will play a big role in determining whether they take the path of future crime, or that of productive contribution to society.

Not all young people can have my luck, but improving our juvenile justice system will make fewer of them need it.

Schuffenhauer graduated from Roy High, was a standout WSU track athlete and an Olympic silver medalist in 2002 as a member of the Men's USA Bobsleigh Team.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Letter to the Editor
The New York Times
July 7, 2008

On any given day, 7,500 juveniles are incarcerated in adult jails. Such facilities are not equipped to safely house these young people. Research demonstrates that they are at increased risk of attack, injury and suicide when compared with those housed in programs designed specifically for adolescents.

Putting juveniles in adult jails is also counterproductive. Young people who are transferred to adult courts are 34 percent more likely to be re-arrested than those retained in the juvenile system.

Consigning juveniles to months or years in adult jails and prisons makes it harder for them to rebuild their lives. Our programs and policies should be designed to keep adolescents in appropriate facilities, with access to the comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation services they need.

Congress and state legislatures should address the issue by strengthening juvenile justice policies and by financing programs that keep youth out of adult jails.

-- David Fassler, Burlington, VT

The writer is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Vermont.

Samples of Personal Stories

Anthony L.: Anthony was a mentally disabled and hearing impaired child of 15 attending West Palm Beach junior high school, Florida. During school hours he reached into a classmate's pocket and stole two dollars in lunch money. Unfortunately for Anthony, his school had recently begun a "zero tolerance" policy on crime. He was soon charged in adult court for strong-arm robbery, extortion and petty theft, facing the possibility of 30 years to life sentence. The prosecutor only dropped the case after a 60 Minutes crew arrived in town to investigate the situation.

Anthony: Early in his life, Anthony's parents and teachers recognized something different about him. Diagnosed with a mental health problem, Anthony was bounced between a total of eight schools, none of them able to treat his condition. At age 12, Anthony stole a car, but successfully completed his probation. At age 17, he was charged with grand theft auto and fleeing the scene of an accident with injuries. He was Direct Filed and charged as an adult. He is currently awaiting placement in a Moderate Risk residential facility for a period of 6-9 months, and after that he faces a Conditional Release for two to four months. He must put his life on hold while waiting for his placement. He is in a state of limbo, unable to get a job and unable to start his sentence.

Dominique: Dominique, an 18 year old girl from Princeton, Florida, is the oldest of four siblings. Her mother dead and her father in prison, she was shuffled between the homes of various family members. At age 16 she committed armed robbery, and was Direct Filed into the adult criminal justice system. She was sentenced to only two months in jail and one year of probation, but according to her those two months were a harsh punishment. Because the youths were separated from the adults, Dominique saw only three other girls during her sentence. When the four youths had recreation, the rest of the facility had to be locked down, so the guards rarely gave them their recreation time. Now that she is on probation, Dominique attends Miami Dade Community College, and plans to go to a university to study Forensic Psychology.

Jeff W.: Jeff was a normal 17 year old kid who made one mistake that would haunt him for the rest of his life. In an attempt to impress a girl he liked, he purchased her marijuana on three separate occasions, and she paid him back for it. He did not profit from the deal, and it was more a friendly exchange than a sale. When she revealed she was an undercover police officer, Jeff found himself being tried as an adult for a felony. Taking pity on him, the judge allowed Jeff to get away with a reduced sentence. Still, the felony conviction prevented Jeff from receiving financial aid for college, and prevented him from joining the Air Force, as he had planned. He currently works full time while attending community college in order to one day own his own IT business.

James O.: James was a promising high school student who had hoped his basketball abilities could secure him a college scholarship. Unfortunately, at 17 he was caught selling marijuana to an undercover officer posing as a student. All of the recruiters who had promised him scholarships backed out, and he was facing a future without college. After his pleads for a second chance, Oklahoma State investigated James's basketball abilities and his character. They found that he was truly remorseful for his actions, and had learned from his mistakes. He was accepted into Oklahoma State and in November of 2004 played his first game with them.

Sample Talking Points



Connecticut: Trying Youth as Adults

Connecticut automatically tries and sentences all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults, regardless of their crime. This policy has failed and must be re-examined.

☞ **Connecticut's policy towards youthful offenders is one of the worst in the nation**

Connecticut is one of only three states nationwide that *automatically* treats all children over the age of 15 as adults *no matter how minor the offense*. In 2005, Connecticut led the nation in the number of youth under 18 years in adult prisons with 383 incarcerated youth – 71% more than any other state,¹ and Connecticut alone confines more youth in adult prisons than at least 22 states combined.²

☞ **Youth in adult prisons do not receive adequate rehabilitation or treatment**

Youth sent to the adult criminal justice system in Connecticut are not eligible for the same kinds of services such as therapy, diversion, or alternatives to incarceration that are available to young people in the juvenile justice system. Simply locking these kids up will not change their behaviors or improve public safety.

☞ **This practice doesn't promote public safety or reduce crime**

There is no evidence that our state's practice of sending 16- and 17-year-olds to adult courts increases public safety. In fact, research done by Northeastern University's Donna Bishop, PhD, has resulted in significant evidence that shows these policies have the *opposite* effect— trying youth in adult court increases crime! Youth who are tried and incarcerated in the adult criminal system are more likely to re-offend, and re-offend more seriously and frequently than young people tried and treated in the juvenile system for the same crimes.

☞ **Adolescents are not adults, making reasoned, adult decisions**

In the Fall of 2006, the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice released the results of ten years of study in an issue brief titled, "Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence." The conclusion drawn in that study is this, "The scientific arguments do not say that adolescents cannot distinguish right from wrong nor that they should be exempt from punishment. Rather, they point to the need to consider the developmental stage of adolescence as a mitigating factor when juveniles are facing criminal prosecution. The same factors that make youths ineligible to vote or to serve on a jury require us to treat them differently from adults when they commit crimes."

¹ Bureau Of Justice Statistics, Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005

² Bureau Of Justice Statistics, Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005

Sample Fact Sheet

Media Fact Sheet on Transfer

Key Terms:

- *Jail*: a locked facility usually reserved for adults who are awaiting trial. In many states, people are sentenced to serve time in an adult jail for misdemeanor offenses whose sentences are for one year or less.
- *Prison*: a locked facility usually reserved for people who have been convicted of felony offenses and serving sentences of a year or longer.
- *Status offense*: a behavior that is only prohibited to youth, such as running away, underage consumption of alcohol, breaking curfew, or truancy.
- *Adjudicated Delinquent*: a youth who has been found guilty by a judge of committing a delinquent act. In general, an adjudicated juvenile can be required to be placed in a juvenile correctional facility, community-based alternative to incarceration, or other non-incarceration program like probation or drug treatment.

Key Facts:

- An estimated 200,000 youth are tried, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults every year across the United States¹
- On any given day, nearly 7,500 young people are locked up in adult jails²
- The overwhelming majority of juveniles who enter adult court are not there for serious, violent crimes.³
- Youth of color are over-represented at every stage of the juvenile justice system, and in the transfer process.⁴
- 40 states permit or require that youth charged as adults be held pre-trial in an adult jail.⁵
- Youth housed in adult institutions are 36 times more likely to commit suicide than are youth housed in facilities for those under the age of 18.⁶
- 21% and 13% of all substantiated victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence in jails in 2005 and 2006 respectively, were youth under the age of 18., though only 1% of jail inmates are juveniles.⁷
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, youth who are transferred from the juvenile court system to the adult criminal system are 34% more likely than youth retained in the juvenile system to be re-arrested for violent or other crime.⁸
- As many as half of the youth tried in adult court will be sent back to the juvenile justice system or not convicted at all. Yet most of these youth will have spent at least one month in an adult jail, and one in five will have spent over six months in an adult jail.⁹

How does “trying as adults” impact youth?

Youth tried in the adult criminal court:

- Face the same penalties as adults, including life without parole;
- Will receive little or no education, mental health treatment, or rehabilitative programming;
- Will obtain an adult criminal record which may significantly limit their future education and employment opportunities;
- Are at greater risk of assault and death in adult jails and prisons with adult inmates;
- Will be more likely to re-offend than youth not exposed to the negative influences and toxic culture of the adult criminal punishment system.

What is the impact on youth of color?

Youth of color are most negatively affected by policies to try youth as adults. For example, in the Building Blocks for Youth report, *Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served?*³ key findings reveal disturbing aspects in the transfer of youth, especially youth of color, to the adult criminal court. The findings show over- representation and disparate treatment of youth of color, and raise serious questions about the fairness and appropriateness of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal system.

Endnotes

¹ Woolard, J. (2005) Juveniles within adult correctional settings: legal pathways and developmental considerations. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health* 4(1), 18; Coalition for Juvenile Justice. (2005).

² *Jailing Juveniles* (2007, November). Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth Justice

³ *The Consequences Aren't Minor: the Impact of Trying Youth as Adults and Strategies for Reform* (2007, March). Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth Justice

⁴ *And Justice for Some* (January, 2007). National Council on Crime and Delinquency

⁵ *Jailing Juveniles* (2007, November). Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth Justice

⁶ *Jailing Juveniles* (2007, November). Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth Justice

⁷ *Sexual Violence Reported by Correctional Authorities* US Bureau of Justice Statistics (2005, 2006).

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). Effects on Violence of Laws and Policies Facilitating the Transfer of Youth from the Juvenile to the Adult Justice System: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventative Services. *MMWR* 2007; 56 (No. RR-9). Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5609.pdf>

⁹ *Jailing Juveniles* (2007, November). Washington, D.C.: Campaign for Youth Justice