

March 13, 2008

Councilmember Phil Mendelson
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 402
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Councilmember Mendelson:

In light of the February 25, 2008, Department of Corrections oversight hearing held by the D.C. City Council Judiciary Committee, I would like to submit a letter for your consideration and for the record. I would like to tell you about my experience in the D.C. Jail when I was 16 years old. I spent 15 months as a young person in the juvenile block of the jail.

While I was at the jail, there wasn't much to do. We had very little programming and virtually no classes, with the exception of the Free Minds Book Club. We would watch TV or sleep most of the time. We had the option to attend a GED class three times a week, but you can't take the GED test at the jail, so many people refused to go because it made no sense to go to class for a test that you couldn't even take. A few people complained about the lack of school and were allowed to go to Oak Hill Academy for school which has a much better system with more programs for juveniles and a staff that is trained to work with youth unlike the jail staff who are only trained to work with adults. At the jail, we were treated like adults even though we weren't adults. When we went to the jail staff with our problems, their answers were to stop crying and stop telling them because we needed to take care of our problems on our own. Our usual way of taking care of problems was fighting which happened in cells, outside of the view of the guards. I saw all of this with my own eyes. It was hard to feel safe in the jail.

Being in that jail made me feel like I was nothing, it made me feel like nothing, because that is how we were treated. We didn't get any programs that would have helped us become better people. Nobody cared about what you had to say or what your problem was. It was like I was invisible. The way they treated us was horrible. The DC jail was the worst place I have ever been; it is no place for a juvenile.

Overall, I think that juveniles should not be placed with adults in adult facilities and that our needs are better served with mental health and drug treatment, life skills classes and job training to help rehabilitate us and better ourselves.

Sincerely,



Christopher