

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE



Ending The Prosecution Of Youth In The Adult Criminal Justice System

THE CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is a national initiative focused entirely on ending the practice of prosecuting, sentencing, and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. CFYJ was initiated in 2004 by a parent whose son was transferred to the adult criminal court for prosecution. Stemming from her family's circumstances and a desire to change state and federal policies that allow for the prosecution of hundreds of thousands of youth in adult court every year, this parent made a financial commitment to launch a national campaign. Subsequently, the Campaign for Youth Justice officially opened in July, 2005.

The strategic goals of CFYJ are to reduce the total number of youth prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system and to decrease the harmful impact of trying youth in adult court. The campaign utilizes both federal and state-level strategies for youth justice reform. We strongly believe that any movement must involve those who are most impacted by the laws and policies. Thus, we seek to empower those affected by encouraging them to use their voices and experiences to affect meaningful change.

CFYJ advances its mission through federal advocacy, media, research and policy initiatives, as well as conducting technical assistance in states.

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THE PROBLEM.

The consequences of an adult conviction aren't minor; they are serious, long-term, life threatening and in some cases, deadly. Every year it is estimated that 200,000 youth under age 18 are prosecuted as adults across the United States. On any given night in America, 6,200 children are held in adult jails and prisons, where they are much more likely to be physically and sexually assaulted, be placed in isolation for "safety" reasons—leading to high rates of suicide and mental health issues. They receive little or no education, mental health or vocational services. Upon re-entry into society they carry the stigma of an adult criminal conviction and as a result have even greater difficulty finding a job, housing or enrolling in college; they are disenfranchised voters and unable to serve in the US military. Despite public opinion to the contrary, research by the Center for Disease Control has shown that sending youth to adult court actually decreases public safety and increases recidivism.

"For the most part, the thing that affected me wasn't the dirt and it wasn't how filthy it was, it was how they treated me. It was crazy because they identified me as a juvenile, and that's the reason they put me in solitary confinement, but they treated me like I was an adult."

— Alisha, age 16



According to the CDC, 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.

WE ADVOCATE.

We advocate for federal and state-based policy solutions. CFYJ believes that campaigns are the most effective way to ensure reform happens. Campaigns can take anywhere from 3-7 years to achieve legislative change. In the states, we equip our partners with the tools they need to execute winning advocacy campaigns across the country by providing high-touch technical assistance. We offer strategic support and guidance around data collection and research, coalition building, community organizing, legislative advice, and communications and media outreach. Since CFYJ was founded a decade ago, more than half the states around the country have enacted reforms to reduce youth prosecuted as adults.

At the federal level, we work in coalition with other national Juvenile Justice organizations to track and educate policy makers on two key federal pieces of legislation: the Prison Rape elimination Act (PREA) and the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP), the only federal laws that protect youth from being housed with adults while in secure detention. These are tools to ensure that all 50 states, DC, and US territories establish a consistent floor in our treatment of youth. We continue to spearhead efforts to ensure that federal and state reform efforts continue – and that they are authorized, funded, and implemented fully.



Since CFYJ was launched in 2005, 30 states have enacted reforms to reduce the prosecution of youth adult criminal court and/or end the placement of youth in adult jails and prisons. As a result, states reported that they held 69% less youth in adult prisons in 2013 than they did in 2000ⁱⁱ.

WE RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS.

Leveraging social and earned media and using real stories, we develop messages to help shape the national dialogue and educate the public about the detrimental effects of trying and incarcerating juveniles as adults, particularly its impact on youth of color, its ineffectiveness in making communities safer, and the need for developmentally appropriate alternatives. Through our National Spokespersons Bureau, we focus on increasing the visibility of youth, parents, and families most directly affected by the issue. Our spokespeople have been featured in media outlets such as the New York Times, MSNBC, and countless state publications.

WE ADVANCE A NATIONAL RESEARCH AGENDA.

Through our research and policy work we seek to more effectively and accurately document the impact of prosecuting youth in adult criminal court. We highlight state and national trends; we develop key facts and policy briefs that can be used nationally and at the local level; and we produce research that identifies trends or emerging issues in the field (e.g. racial and ethnic disparities, housing practices in jails and prisons) . CFYJ presents these findings at conferences and trainings across the country, and serves as a clearinghouse for best practices to increase the success of future campaigns.

WE BUILD A NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

Over the past decade, there has been a lot of movement recognizing that kids are different from adults and should be treated differently. To highlight state reforms, new research, and raise the voice of impacted youth and families, CFYJ hosts Youth Justice Awareness Month (YJAM) each October. Started by a family member in Missouri, YJAM is an opportunity for local advocates, families, policy makers and concerned residents to “join the movement” and get involved in changing the way we treat youth. States across the country host awareness-building events like film screenings, arts-events, fundraisers, research panels, parades, etc to raise awareness on this issue. CFYJ creates supportive tweets, infographics and days of action to encourage more awareness on the need for reform.

THE CASE FOR SUPPORT.

With a budget of just \$1.1 million, the Campaign for Youth Justice accomplishes a great deal with extremely limited resources. Due in large part to the strong leadership of CFYJ there is growing support at both the state and national levels for removing youth from the adult system. We’ve developed a strong network of families, advocates, and coalitions across the country to who learn from each other, share best practices, and ultimately lead to successful reforms.



“As a small, state-based organization, CFYJ has been essential in helping us craft a successful, targeted campaign to bring meaningful justice reform to our state. In our recent efforts to prevent youth from being charged as adults in Maryland and keeping them out of adult jails, CFYJ provided long-term, top-notch organizing support, policy consulting, and strategic messaging which helped put our campaign over the top.”

–Kara Aanenson, Director of Advocacy at JustKids Partnership a campaign of Community Law in Action

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