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## **Bipartisan Bill to Strengthen Federal Juvenile Justice Law Introduced in Congress**

*H.R. 1809 is first step in effort to finish unfinished business from last year to reauthorize and strengthen the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)*

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Today, bipartisan legislation was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives to strengthen and update the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP). H.R. 1809, introduced by Representative Jason Lewis (R-MN) and Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA), reflect the commitment of this new Congress to complete unfinished business left over from last year and ensure that this landmark law is renewed.

Last year, similar legislation was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives, 382-29, and a nearly identical bipartisan bill was unanimously approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Efforts to approve final legislation in the closing days of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress were not successful.

“Today’s action reaffirms the bipartisan commitment to this successful law, which – for more than 40 years – has strengthened states’ ability to keep children and youth out of the justice system, protect those young people in custody, and advance evidence-based practices to help youth get back on track and keep communities safe,” said Marcy Mistrett, Co-chair of the ACT4JJ Campaign and CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice. “We applaud the steadfast leadership of Representatives Lewis and Scott for making renewal of this law a priority in the first session of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress.”

Signed into law by President Gerald Ford on September 7, 1974, and most recently reauthorized in 2002, the JJDP embodies an important state-federal partnership that serves to protect children and youth in the juvenile and criminal justice system, to effectively address high-risk and delinquent behavior, and to improve community safety.

"We're pleased to see that the JJDP continues to be a priority for Congress in 2017 and are grateful for all of the hard work that has gone into this bill's introduction," said Naomi Smoot, Co-Chair of the ACT4JJ Campaign and Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. "Reauthorizing the JJDP makes sense socially and fiscally, and we are hopeful that the legislation will become law soon."

More than nine years overdue for reauthorization, the JJDPa is the only federal statute that sets out national standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system and provides direction and support for state juvenile justice system improvements.

H.R. 1809 would build upon these national standards by reducing the placement of youth in adult jails pre-trial, providing more structure to the law's requirement to decrease racial and ethnic disparities, and calling on states to phase out exceptions that allow the detention of youth who have engaged in status offense behaviors. The bill also promotes the use of alternatives to incarceration; supports the implementation of trauma-informed, evidence-based practices; calls for the elimination of dangerous practices in confinement, including the use of restraints on pregnant girls; improves conditions and educational services for incarcerated youth; focuses on the particular needs of special youth population such as trafficked youth and Tribal youth; and increases accountability.

For more information go to [www.ACT4JJ.org](http://www.ACT4JJ.org)

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**About Act 4 Juvenile Justice** - *Act 4 Juvenile Justice (ACT4JJ) is a campaign of the National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (NJJDPC), which represents over 80 national organizations who work on youth development and juvenile justice issues. ACT4JJ is composed of juvenile justice, child welfare and youth development organizations advocating for the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPa) and increased federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services.*