

CAMPAIGN FOR

YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Parent and Family Member Case Profile Toolkit

1012 14th Street, N.W., Suite 610
Washington, DC 20005
202-558-3580
www.campaignforyouthjustice.org

Dear Parent or Family Member,

On behalf of the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ), a national campaign dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating children under 18 in the adult criminal justice system, we would like to invite your participation in the CFYJ Parent and Family Member Case Profiles Project. The Case Profiles Project gathers personal stories from individuals that have been prosecuted under age 18 in the adult criminal justice system as well as their parents and families. The purpose of collecting these stories is to understand the experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for change of those who are or have been directly affected by the prosecution of children in the adult criminal justice system. We hope to establish a platform for youth and families to communicate to policymakers, the public and the media their concerns and the real-life impact of state correctional programs on youth and families.

Your assistance in this effort is greatly needed and appreciated. Your story will help us to achieve our goals of:

- raising awareness about the negative impact of prosecuting youthful offenders in the adult criminal justice system and of incarcerating youthful offenders in adult jails and prisons;
- reducing the number of youthful offenders who are tried, sentenced, and incarcerated in the adult system, rather than adjudicated in the juvenile justice system;
- decreasing the harmful impact of trying youthful offenders in adult court; and
- promoting research-based, developmentally-appropriate rehabilitative programs and services for youthful offenders as an alternative to the adult system.

Profiles are particularly integral to our awareness work in which we highlight youth, parent, and family voices through reports, policy briefs, publications, newsletters, and the CFYJ website. We hope that this toolkit contains everything you need to effectively tell your story. The toolkit includes: a consent form, because we will not share any information about you without permission; tips on how to write your profile; example stories; an informational form with questions to guide your writing; information on where to send your profile; and paper on which to write your story.

Thank you so much for your participation in this project. With your help we can effect change and reform the juvenile justice system. If you need to reach us for any reason during your participation in the project, please contact:

Kate Figiel
Campaign for Youth Justice
Phone: 202.558.3580
Email: kfigiel@campaign4youthjustice.org

We look forward to hearing from you!

Kate Figiel
Communications and Outreach Assistant
Campaign for Youth Justice

Case Profiles Project Consent Form

Purpose: The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is collecting case profiles of individuals that have been prosecuted under age 18 in the adult criminal justice system as well as their parents and families. CFYJ uses case profiles to inform national and state policymakers, the public and the media about why youth should not be prosecuted as adults.

Contact Information:

Name: _____ Male Female

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name of Child/Family Member: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Child/Family Member's Gender: Male Female

**Parent or Family Member of
 (check all that apply):**

**Child/Family Member's Detention
 Facility/Address/State (if applicable):**

- Formerly incarcerated child
- Formerly jailed child
- Currently incarcerated child
- Currently jailed child
- Child who committed suicide in prison or jail

Consent (check any that apply):

Yes, I give the Campaign for Youth Justice my consent to talk with me about my experience.
 Name (signature): _____ Date: _____

Yes, I give the Campaign for Youth Justice permission to make my case profile, but **not** my name, my child/family member's name, or any personal identifying information, publicly available to policymakers, the media and the public on the CFYJ website, newsletter, and in CFYJ materials. I would like to use the following as an alias when referred to in CFYJ materials:

Name (signature): _____ Date: _____

Yes, I give the Campaign for Youth Justice permission to make my name and my case profile publicly available to policymakers, the media and the public on the CFYJ website, newsletter, and in CFYJ materials.
 Name (signature): _____ Date: _____

Yes, I give the Campaign for Youth Justice permission to edit the my case profile for length and readability.
 Name (signature): _____ Date: _____

Case Profiles Project Informational Form

Please share any/all of the following information on the provided sheets of lined paper. Feel free to use additional sheets or type your responses as well as include any poetry, pictures or other information that will help in writing your profile.

1. Background information: Please tell us a little about yourself and your family.
2. Stories of life in adult criminal justice system: Tell us about your personal or family's experience having a child/family member in jail or the adult system. Tell us about your child's experience. Do you have any stories you'd like to share?
3. Access to programs & services in the adult criminal justice system: Please tell us what you know about the kind of programs and services that are/were available in jail or the adult system such as education, health care, mental health, recreation, and other programs.
4. Disproportionate contact of youth of color with justice system: Do you think that race and/or ethnicity was/is a factor in your child/family member's court proceedings and/or treatment in jail or prison?
5. Looking to the Future: How do you see your family's or your child's future being affected by this experience? What are the challenges you and your child/family member must face? What are your family's or your child's hopes, dreams, and goals?
6. Recommendations for change: How would you change current policies that jail children under 18 or try, sentence and incarcerate them in the adult criminal justice system?
7. Other information: Please feel free to share any other information that would highlight your personal or family's experience with jails or the adult criminal justice system.

Please send the signed consent form, the informational pages and any other materials by mail, fax or email to the appropriate state office listed below:

Connecticut: Abby Anderson, Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, 2470 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06605; Phone: 203.579.2727; Fax: 203.333.9118; Email: abby@ctjja.org

North Carolina: Sorien Schmidt, Action for Children North Carolina, 1300 St. Mary's Street, Suite 500, Raleigh, NC 27605; Phone 919.843.6623; Fax 919.829.7299; Email sorien@ncchild.org

Virginia: Abigail Turner, Just Children, 1000 Preston Avenue, Suite A, Charlottesville, VA 22903; Phone: 434.977.0553; Fax: 434.977.0558; Email: abigail@justice4all.org

Wisconsin: Wendy Henderson, Wisconsin Council on Children & Families, 16 N. Carroll Street, Suite 600, Madison, Wisconsin 53703; Phone: 608.284.0580; Fax: 608.284.0583; Email: whenderson@wccf.org

For all other states and DC: Kate Figiel, Campaign for Youth Justice, 1012 14th Street, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20005; Phone: 202.558.3580 ; Fax: 202.386.9807; Email: kfigiel@campaign4youthjustice.org

Storytelling Tips and Guidelines

- ❖ Be honest and sincere.
- ❖ Include background information and describe situations, experiences, and feelings when relevant.
- ❖ Be succinct and concise. Include details and descriptions when you believe they are pertinent to your story.
- ❖ Use language that is confident and serious.
- ❖ For privacy purposes, please do not include your child's case number or the names of attorneys or judges.
- ❖ Do your best with grammar, word choice, sentence structure, and spelling but do not worry excessively about this because, with your permission (see the Case Profiles Project Consent Form), we will edit your story prior to using it.
- ❖ Feel free, but not obligated, to include information about your child's crime(s) and sentence(s).
- ❖ Know that you, and only you, are the expert on your experience. All of your experiences and feelings are valid.

Case Profile Examples

The following are examples of parent profiles and testimony that we have included in publications and on our website. Your story does not need to conform to these formats or lengths but we include them to provide a sense of what kind of language and information we have found to be powerful in sharing the stories of parents whose children have been jailed or incarcerated as children. Additionally, while the following are all told from a parent's perspective, feel free to write from the perspective of whomever you'd like: yourself, a friend, an anonymous outsider, etc.

Georgia Mae Williamson

Thank you for allowing me to present my family's story today. My name is Georgia Mae Williamson and my grandson, whom I will call "D," was sentenced to juvenile life without the possibility of parole, a sentence of six years in a maximum secure-care prison. My grandson is an example of a child who fell through the cracks of the juvenile justice system.

D had always been physically and emotionally fragile. He was a sensitive child who required protection. We were shocked when D admitted his behavior which we later found out lacked evidence. We thought D definitely needed help, and our family turned to the system.

D's parole officer advised the court that he had never seen such a well-behaved child and encouraged the court to impose an alternative sentence to the maximum. The victim's mother also asked the court not to impose juvenile life. I personally begged the court to find some alternative. D had never been in trouble before, especially with the law.

When D first arrived at Jetson, he received no psychological counseling. It's common knowledge that sexual abuse left unchecked and untreated, spirals into an infinite cycle. Needless to say, maximum security incarceration was not the place for this child.

Worse, D was terrorized, threatened, and physically abused by guards at Jetson. On June 3, 2003, after being assaulted by several guards, another guard forced D to his knees and threatened him sexually. After D called home, reporting the incident to me, I called the warden, who said he would investigate. Later that evening, my grandson was threatened by three officers, who told him that if I did not back off, D would be “thrown to the Wolves,” referring to the dormitory containing youths incarcerated for the most serious offenses. He said the guards could no longer protect him from the others. The colonel later called me at home telling me that we would be sorry if we pursued an investigation.

The Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) investigated D’s case, and was able to file an emergency motion to get D out of Jetson. We then had hearings to discover the truth. D took and passed a polygraph test. He was telling the truth. The guards who terrorized my grandson refused to take the same test.

The New Testament taught us to forgive the sinner and love the youth, but the state of Louisiana still practices Old Testament retribution. I’m ashamed to say our state still sacrifices the youth.

I understand the difficulties of changing our system. But when a scared, harmless 15-year old boy is thrown to the wolves, behind razor wire, dragging shackles, living in fear, far from home, it will turn him into nothing but a serious criminal or a ghost of the child who once gave our family such joy.

Please prevent other sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of Louisiana from falling through the cracks. Fix our broken system so at least when our youth are taken they receive therapy, close to home in small and safe facilities.

Thank you.

Georgia Mae Williamson

Diana Gonzalez

Good afternoon. My name is Diana Gonzalez. I am here to support H.B. 5782, calling for 16- and 17-year-olds to be tried in the juvenile justice system instead of the adult justice system. I know first-hand the consequences of treating youth like adults. My son was David Burgos. David committed suicide last July 24 while he was incarcerated at Manson Youth Institution. He was 17 years old.

We are never going to get a good outcome when teenagers are put together with adults. Teenagers and adults are different from each other. It’s like mixing goats and sheep in the same pasture. You can’t do it. It doesn’t work. What’s frustrating for me is that we know it doesn’t work. We’ve known it doesn’t work for a long time.

So here is my question. What’s it going to take for us to make the change? This issue has already been in front of the legislature for several years. Why do we have to wait until there is a crisis? Why do we wait for a tragedy? Why does someone like my son have to die before we make a change we know is right? It’s time for us to stop talking about making this change and do it. I’m tired of hearing that this is a problem and not seeing any changes being made. I’m tired of reading the articles in the paper and realizing that this is all about money – that people think a change is too expensive.

I’m here today to tell you that it isn’t about the money. It’s about doing the right thing. Do we have the money to do the right thing? We do. We spend the money now; we are just spending the money that we have in the wrong way. The way the system operates now doesn’t work. My son is an example of that. Really, it’s common sense. When you want something you have to invest in it and do the work before you see the rewards. Business people do it all the time. You don’t see the rewards right away, but over time you see all the rewards and you save money in the long run by spending it correctly in the beginning. It’s about setting priorities and about spending your money in line with those priorities.

There’s talk about making changes in the adult system to make cells or programs better for youth. That would be spending money foolishly. You can’t make an adult cell appropriate for a youth. It also shows a mix-up in priorities – that it’s more important to save money than to save youth. What I’m hearing now is that our youth aren’t worth tackling a problem that might be hard and cost some money. What I’m hearing is that my son wasn’t worth it.

Here’s the real question I want to ask you – the real reason I’m here today. Whose child is next? It could be my neighbor’s child, it could be your neighbor’s child, it could be your child. Put yourselves in these shoes. What decision would you make for your child? How would you want your child treated? Make this change. Keep 16- and 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system. Thank you.

