CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE
BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Embargoed for release
12:00 pm -- November 29, 2007

Contact: Liz Ryan, 202-558-3580 ext 11or Cell 703-309-5433

New Report Published by CDC:
Prosecuting Youths as Adults Creates Younger Repeat Offenders
Separate Juvenile Justice System is Essential to Reduce Recidivism

(Washington, DC) – A study published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), led by a non federal Task Force on Community Preventive Services, released today finds that transferring youth to the adult criminal justice system significantly increases crime and rather than improve public safety, produces the opposite effect. Youth who have been previously tried as adults are, on average, 34% more likely to commit crimes than youth retained in the juvenile justice system.

After an extensive review of published scientific evidence, the Task Force on Community Preventive Services recommended "Against laws or policies facilitating the transfer of juveniles from the juvenile to the adult judicial system."

"The practice of transferring juveniles to the adult justice system fails young offenders and society at large," said Robert L. Johnson, Interim Dean of the UMNDJ - New Jersey Medical School and a nationally recognized expert on adolescent issues who served on the Task Force. "While in adult prisons, impressionable youth offenders are placed among hardened criminals who take them under their wings and groom them for a life of crime. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that youth offenders transferred to the adult criminal system are later arrested 34 percent more frequently than are their peers sent to juvenile courts and facilities."

"We have known this disturbing information for some time. Now the CDC's publication of the task force findings recognizes this information as fact. This is an important and critical step to updating current federal and state policies to reflect this compelling research," observed Liz Ryan, executive director of the Campaign for Youth Justice.

The CDC published the Task Force findings in their latest *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report – Reports and Recommendations*. The study found that violent outcomes associated with the transfer of youth to the adult system include:

- An increase in pretrial violence
- Victimization of juveniles in adult facilities
- Elevated suicide rates for juveniles incarcerated in adult facilities.

In Ryan's view, the Task Force report sets the stage for continued and meaningful reform. She noted, "We are counting on Congress to slam shut the 'loophole' in the federal law that places youth at risk in adult jails. And we are calling on state and local officials to reverse their policies that send more and more youth to adult courts, jails and prisons every year."

The release of the Task Force Report coincides with the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974. Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on the JJDPA are set for December 5th.

The original intent of the JJDPA was to shield children from the dangers of adult jails by separating them from adults and ultimately removing them from adult jails altogether. Under the original "Jail Removal"

requirement of the Act, youth cannot be detained in adult jails except in limited situations, and in those narrow circumstances the "Sight and Sound Separation" requirement prohibits contact with adults.

This Task Force Report recommendations support updating the JJDPA by extending its ban on the placement of children (age 18 or younger) in adult jails, no matter what court they are in – juvenile or adult. These important updates are supported by a coalition of over 200 organizations nationwide through its initiative: The Act 4 Juvenile Justice Campaign, which calls on Congress to reauthorize the JJDPA (www.act4jj.org).

Reauthorization of the JJDPA would reflect the will of the people. A February 2007 Zogby Poll, commissioned by the National Council on Crime & Delinquency (NCCD), revealed that 7 out of 10 respondents believe that putting youth under the age 18 in adult correctional facilities makes them more likely to commit crime.

The Task Force Report follows the release of a new report by the Campaign for Youth Justice, Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America, which found that on an average day 7,500 young people are held in adult jails in the United States – with an annual rate possibly several times higher.

The Campaign for Youth Justice report's findings about the risk youth face in jail echo the Task Force report and are disturbing and shocking:

- Sexual Assault: When youth are placed with adults in adult jails, they are at risk of physical and sexual assault. In 2005, 21% of all substantiated victims of inmate-on-inmate sexual violence were under eighteen years old, even though youth make up less than 1% of the total jail population.
- Suicide: Youth have the highest suicide rates of all inmates in jails. They are 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility, and 19 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than youth in the general population.
- Damage to Communities and Public Safety: Placing youth in the adult criminal justice system increases their likelihood of re-offending. Children who are prosecuted in adult court are more likely to be re-arrested more often and more quickly for serious offenses.

"Now that we have the facts borne out by every scrap of data on the subject, let's turn our attention toward fixing a flawed strategy," Dr. Johnson said.

The Task Force Report is available online at: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5609a1.htm

The Jailing Juveniles report is available online at:
http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/national_reports.html

The independent, nonfederal Task Force on Community Preventive Services (Task Force) develops the Guide to Community Preventive Services (Community Guide), with the support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in collaboration with public and private partners. Although CDC provides staff support to the Task Force for development of the Community Guide, the recommendations presented in this report were developed by the Task Force and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of CDC or DHHS.

###

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is a national not-for-profit 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