


CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH  JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

Legislative Advocacy Guide

Prepared by the Campaign for Youth Justice

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Dear Youth Advocate:

The Campaign for Youth Justice seeks to raise awareness about the impact of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal justice system. We believe that youth deserve a second chance, and should not be tried and incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system.

In taking action, you will be joined by many other people throughout the country in sharing your views on the impact of state policies of trying and sentencing children as adults and why the laws needs to be re-examined.

This guide contains:

- ³⁵/₁₇ What You Can Do
- ³⁵/₁₇ Tips Sheets
- ³⁵/₁₇ Sample Materials

We hope you find this information helpful as we work together to make a difference in the lives of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

The Campaign for Youth Justice

Why Get Involved with “Legislative Advocacy”?

Elected Officials are Important Decision-Makers:

State legislatures are primarily responsible for the development of juvenile and criminal justice policy, including transfer and waiver laws.

State legislatures approve state budgets and appropriate resources for juvenile justice systems, programs, and activities.

States have primary oversight of juvenile and criminal justice agencies.

You Can Improve Outcomes for Youth:

Educate policy-makers about your issue by sharing your stories and experiences.

Create community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration.

Change state policy on how youth are treated in the justice system.

Require data collection on youth in the justice system.

Make an agency do business differently.

There is Always an Opportunity to Effect Change:

It's never too early or too late to start doing legislative advocacy.

You need to engage with legislators identify opportunities for improvement.

Whether you are able to advance a comprehensive bill or make a small legislative change will depend on the support you muster. You and your base, along with your one to two closest legislative allies, will need to make that decision.

If you are just getting started, you may want to connect with an allied group who has advocacy experience and shadow them for a session to learn about the process.

Gearing Up for the Legislative Session

Overview:

Most state legislatures are bicameral, which means there are two bodies: a Senate and a House of Representatives (or House of Delegates or General Assembly). However, state legislatures vary widely in size, and in the frequency and length of their working sessions.

- ³⁵/₁₇ Legislatures meet annually or every other year, but most state legislatures are in session for at least part of the year.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Some legislatures have full-time policy staff, and some do not.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Some legislators have full-time jobs outside their work as a state representative.

Every state has a slightly different process, so you will need to tailor this advice to your state. To find out more about your state legislature, when it meets and how it operates you can look on your state government website.

The National Conference of State Legislatures also has information on state legislatures, including a State Legislative Websites Directory on its website at www.ncsl.org.

Getting Started:

Find a Home. Establish yourself in the community with office space where you are accessible and can do the work to plan and move your agenda forward.

Organize. It is difficult to do two things at the same time, so do your organizing work **before** the legislative session begins.

Find People who know your State's legislature. Keep in mind that they do not necessarily have to know or work on juvenile or criminal justice issues. Your state ACLU or NAACP chapters are good places to start. Talk to more than one person. Set up individual meetings to ask their advice about interacting with the legislature.

Questions to ask:

- ³⁵/₁₇ How does the legislature work?
- ³⁵/₁₇ What is the process for getting bills introduced, amended, and passed?
- ³⁵/₁₇ What is the budget process?
- ³⁵/₁₇ When does the legislature meet?
- ³⁵/₁₇ How are legislators staffed?
- ³⁵/₁₇ What are the key committees with oversight of juvenile and criminal justice issues, agencies, funding and programs?
- ³⁵/₁₇ Who are the committee leaders? Who are important legislative leaders?

Identify the Key Legislative Players. You will need to identify the key “players” including members of the legislative leadership, committee chairs, other influential members of the legislature and their committees, and the individuals and organizations that have the ability to influence legislators. Depending on the role of the staff, also identify the key staffers. Map the “players” with your network. See who in your network may live in the district of any of the key legislators.

Do your Research. Make sure you know current policies and practices in your area and are aware of any pending or possible legislative proposals already in the works.

Be Seen. Plan to spend time in the legislature during the session. Even if you don’t have a bill to be considered during the session, you want to have a regular, visible during the session.

Identify Allies. Find out which organizations would naturally be interested in your issue and reach out to them. Possibilities include children’s groups, mental health organizations and faith-based groups. Learn who has advocacy days planned and try to get your issue on their agenda. If you do have a bill under consideration, ask your allies, to add your issue to their legislative agenda. Note that these groups often meet in the fall to decide their legislative priorities. Be prepared to provide allies with substantive support on your issue, such as fact sheets, talking points, and other draft materials.

Build Relationships. Try to get members of your network to meet with the key legislative players before the legislative session. It is difficult to build relationships during the session as legislators tend to focus solely on their legislative proposals.

Create a “Core team”. To help you advance your goals, pull together a core team of three people as follow:

³⁵₁₇ **Legislative Advocate** – This person will help maintain a presence in the capitol, stay in touch with lobbyists, oversee the legislative strategy, and serve as the main contact with key legislators.

³⁵₁₇ **Action Team Leader** – This person will coordinate weekly presence at the capitol, create action alerts, serve as the contact for other organizations engaged in similar activities, and activate the base when needed by phone or email.

³⁵₁₇ **Media Coordinator** – This person will create a media list, serve as main contact for the media, and develop relationships with reporters and other press contacts in the capitol.

Identify Potential Opposition. Find out who has opposed your issue(s) in the past. Determine whether reaching out to them would help. Understand the arguments they will make against your position and be prepared to respond.

Develop a Media List. Create a media list of contacts that cover your issue and the areas or districts represented by the key legislators on your issue. Build relationships with state capitol reporters and key individuals at your state’s main newspaper.

Develop a Plan of Action. Host a legislative strategy session among key allies to determine how to best advance your goal. You can include a state legislator or their staff, the local ACLU, system experts, others advocate or some combination of key stakeholders. Use this session to figure out what is needed – visibility on an issue, a legislative change, or education for new legislators. Empower your group with information. Ask for advice and input on strategy.

Identify Legislative Champions. From your list of key Legislative players, determine who is willing to author legislation, host a hearing and/or work with you to advance your agenda. Plan to staff these key legislators and provide them with fact sheets, talking points and other support materials.

Don’t Get Discouraged! It may take more than one legislative session to accomplish your goals.

Making the Most of the Legislative Session

You’ve done all your planning. You have set a legislative agenda. You have mapped out a strategy to move your agenda forward. And, you have a team to implement it. Now it’s time to bring it all together during the legislative session to reach your goal.

The following Sample Timeline and Tips Sheets provide the information you need to help execute some of the basic advocacy strategies involved in advancing legislative goals:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Communicating with Legislators
- ³⁵/₁₇ Introducing a Bill
- ³⁵/₁₇ Hosting a Briefing
- ³⁵/₁₇ Testifying at a Hearing
- ³⁵/₁₇ Preparing for a Vote
- ³⁵/₁₇ Media Outreach

Along the way remember to thank allies and supporters, celebrate your victories, and learn from your missteps or legislative defeats.

Sample Timeline

August

- ³⁵₁₇ Learn about the legislative process and timing.
- ³⁵₁₇ Research any current or possible legislative proposals in your issue area.
- ³⁵₁₇ Identify key players in the legislature.
- ³⁵₁₇ Find out which groups have advocacy days at the capitol in the winter/spring.
- ³⁵₁₇ Draft a legislative agenda.

September

- ³⁵₁₇ Schedule discussion to finalize legislative agenda and prioritize asks.
- ³⁵₁₇ Prioritize and reach out to groups that have advocacy days to get on their agenda.
- ³⁵₁₇ Identify key allies both inside and outside of the legislature.
- ³⁵₁₇ Identify a champion legislator(s) who will work directly with you on your agenda.

October

- ³⁵₁₇ Host a legislative strategy session to help determine how you will push your agenda.
- ³⁵₁₇ Create an Action Team to build relationships with legislators and other allies.
- ³⁵₁₇ Write bill draft or tap a local public defender or law firm to help you on a pro bono basis.

November

- ³⁵₁₇ Organize a legislative training session for your Action Team.
- ³⁵₁₇ Identify opposition and barriers.
- ³⁵₁₇ Create media lists.
- ³⁵₁₇ Create a fact sheet on your bill and/or compile useful research and support materials for distribution.

December

- ³⁵₁₇ Vet your bill with other organizations and line up their support.
- ³⁵₁₇ Confirm bill sponsor(s). If possible, try to secure a sponsor from both political parties; bi-partisan proposals are more likely to be successful.
- ³⁵₁₇ Create a timeline for the legislative session with key dates, such as committee hearings, floor activity, and possible opportunities to promote your agenda/legislation.

January

- ³⁵₁₇ Write a media advisory and/or press release to use with the introduction of your bill.
- ³⁵₁₇ Draft an Action Alert to send to your networks to call for support the bill once introduced.
- ³⁵₁₇ Draft additional materials to promote your bill on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites.

February - May

- ³⁵₁₇ Continue to gather co-sponsors – this is a great activity for allied organizations.
- ³⁵₁₇ Host a briefing on your bill. Invite community members, legislators, and the media.
- ³⁵₁₇ Work with the bill sponsor and other key legislator(s) to hold a public hearing on the legislation.
- ³⁵₁₇ Conduct media outreach, including editorial board meetings and one-on-one conversations with reporters.
- ³⁵₁₇ Ask allies to draft op-ed pieces and Letters-to-the-Editor.
- ³⁵₁₇ Speak about the issue at community events to help spread the word about your bill. Look for events in key legislators' districts where they are more likely to hear about your presentation.
- ³⁵₁₇ Continue to send Action Alerts at key moments during the legislative session to generate support calls, emails and letters to legislators.

June - July

- ³⁵₁₇ Celebrate victories. Thank legislative champions, allies and supporters.
- ³⁵₁₇ If the bill does not pass, figure out why. Talk to legislators and others about potential obstacles and use that information to adjust your strategy for the next legislative session.

Tips Sheets

Communicating with Legislators

Phone Calls:

Before calling, make sure you are armed with any information, data and/or stories that will help you convey your position on an issue or bill. Jot down notes as to what you will discuss, but do not write yourself an entire script to read from.

Call during normal business hours, 9 am to 5 pm, Monday-Friday.

Introduce yourself with your full name, and be polite throughout the conversation. Your legislator is probably busy, so ask for a member of their staff to listen to you and relay your concerns to the legislator. Make sure you write down the full name of the staff member you talked to for future reference.

Make your concerns known. Bring up the specific pieces of legislation you prepared to discuss. Explain why the issue is important to you without being overly emotional. Speak slowly and clearly, so the person listening can take notes.

Once you have voiced your concerns, give the staff member your name and address and ask for a written response. Let them know you will call them back to find what specific steps have been taken to address your concerns.

When the conversation is over, politely thank the person on the other end for their time and consideration.

Meetings:

Call your legislator's office at least two weeks in advance to set up a brief appointment. Expect an appointment time to range from 15 to 30 minutes.

Ask to speak to the scheduler or staff member who manages the legislator's schedule.

Be sure to write down the date, time and who you spoke with to set up the meeting so you have a record.

Confirm the appointment in writing, either through a brief letter or an email and include the purpose, who will attend, and the date.

Be prepared. If you are with a group, set up a prep meeting to discuss agenda, and assign a facilitator and roles of who will cover what so all items are covered and everyone stays on message. Be sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak.

Prepare a one-page fact sheet as “leave behind” information for the legislator and staff. Plan to bring copies of any other reports or helpful background information to leave behind.

Call to reconfirm with the staff the day before.

Provide staff with a list of participants if there are others with you.

Arrive early.

Be courteous, respectful and brief.

Ask the questions and listen to their concerns. If the legislator or staff person asks a question you don't know the answer to, offer to look into it and report back.

Don't underestimate the importance of staff.

Thank the legislator and/or staff at the end of the meeting.

Follow up with a thank you letter or email and reiterate your key points.

Call staff to follow up.

Introducing a Bill

You have decided on a legislative goal, worked with allies to draft legislation and identified a legislative sponsor to introduce the bill. The next step is to make the most of the bill's introduction.

- ³⁵₁₇ Gather letters and statements of support from allied organizations, key stakeholders and others. Examples include other non-profit organizations and advocates, public defenders, law enforcement, juvenile justice officials, parents, and youth.
- ³⁵₁₇ Help your sponsor gather additional legislators who will co-sponsor the bill. You will be most effective if you can find co-sponsors from all the political parties.
- ³⁵₁₇ Collect stories from families, youth and others affected by the legislation. Use those stories in your media outreach and provide them to your legislative supporters to include in their remarks.
- ³⁵₁₇ Alert the media. You can do anything from issuing a simple media advisory or press release to planning a press conference with speakers.
- ³⁵₁₇ Send an Action Alert to your membership, allies and other partners asking them to contact their legislator to tell them to support or cosponsor the bill.
- ³⁵₁₇ After the bill is introduced, be sure to thank your sponsor(s). You may also consider submitting a Letter-to-the-Editor or drafting an op-ed about the bill, its importance, and the critical leadership role of your lead legislative sponsor.

Requesting a Hearing or Hosting a Forum

One way to increase visibility of your issue or bill and educate legislators and the public is to request a public hearing or host a public forum. If you have a bill, it would be ideal for your sponsor to request a hearing in the legislative committee with jurisdiction over the bill – most likely the Judiciary or Public Safety Committee.

If you are not able to get a committee hearing, you can host your own forum. This is more work for you, but can serve a similar purpose. See a checklist of tips for each type of event.

Legislative Hearing

- ³⁵₁₇ Work with your legislative sponsor to request a hearing in the legislative committee with jurisdiction over your bill. The request is generally made of the committee chair as part of the committee's regular business.
- ³⁵₁₇ If possible, work with your bill sponsor and/or the legislative committee staff to identify and secure individuals to testify on the bill. Examples of good candidates to provide testimony include youth, parents, researchers, system officials and others with personal experience or expertise.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be prepared to help draft testimony and provide background information and support materials for the hearing,
- ³⁵₁₇ Send a media advisory about the hearing to let the press know about the hearing and who is testifying,
- ³⁵₁₇ Issue a press release after the hearing to highlight the testimony and the problem your bill seeks to address.

Public Forum

- ³⁵₁₇ Pick a date and location.
- ³⁵₁₇ Develop an agenda and invite participants to speak. Speakers can include your legislative sponsor, youth, parents, researchers, system officials and others with personal experience or expertise.
- ³⁵₁₇ Engage allies in the agenda. Give them a speaking or facilitating role if appropriate, and ask them to help advertise the event and invite guests and help ensure turnout.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be prepared to help draft testimony and provide background information and support materials for participants.
- ³⁵₁₇ Send a media advisory about the hearing to let the press know about the event.
- ³⁵₁₇ Post information about the forum in community calendars.
- ³⁵₁₇ Issue a press release the day of the event about the forum to draw attention to your issue/advocacy effort.

Testifying at a Hearing

Not sure you want to testify? Sign up anyway. You might be removed from the list, but often you cannot wait to sign up the day of the hearing.

Prepare both oral & written testimony.

Ask yourself, “What are the three most important things I want legislators to remember when I finish my testimony?”

³⁵₁₇ Write them down

³⁵₁₇ Add some detail under each point

³⁵₁₇ Once you’ve got some detail, you can write out what you want to say

Remember that you can give legislators a longer version of what you will deliver orally at the hearing. You can prepare a shorter version with your key points to present in person and a lengthier version with more detail to submit in writing.

Written testimony is important to ensure that there is a public record of your testimony for legislators that don’t attend and for the press.

³⁵₁₇ Include your name and organizational affiliation in the testimony.

³⁵₁₇ Give examples or include a personal story.

³⁵₁₇ Include any relevant research or statistics.

³⁵₁₇ Refer to any visual aids that you plan to bring (e.g. pictures, art, work, charts).

³⁵₁₇ Offer to be a resource to legislators on the issue to answer questions or provide additional information.

³⁵₁₇ Be sure to include a sentence thanking legislators for holding/attending the hearing and examining or addressing the issue.

³⁵₁₇ Practice ahead of time by reading your testimony aloud.

³⁵₁₇ Time yourself. If your testimony is over ten minutes, you may need to edit what you will say. Remember that you can submit written testimony that is longer. Keeping the testimony brief is always welcomed by legislators.

Finalize your testimony:

³⁵₁₇ Proofread, spell check, and make final edits.

³⁵₁₇ Ask someone else to do the final proofread.

³⁵₁₇ For written testimony, double space it, print in 12-point font, and be sure to include your name, address and telephone number.

³⁵₁₇ For oral testimony, you may want to triple space it and use large font. You might also consider utilizing index cards.

The day before the hearing:

³⁵₁₇ Decide how you are getting to and from the hearing and arrange transportation.

- ³⁵₁₇ Be sure you have the hearing location, directions and any contact information (e.g. - legislative staff, capitol switchboard).
- ³⁵₁₇ Decide what you will wear.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be sure to set your alarm clock and ask a friend to call you as an extra backup.
- ³⁵₁₇ Make copies of your written testimony.
- ³⁵₁₇ Have your oral testimony ready (e.g. - large print for easy reading or index cards).
- ³⁵₁₇ Assemble any visual materials you plan to use.

The day of the hearing:

- ³⁵₁₇ Plan to be at the hearing 30 minutes early.
- ³⁵₁₇ Check in with the committee's legislative staff to be sure you are on the witness list and submit copies of your written testimony to the committee.
- ³⁵₁₇ Make sure you are comfortable (e.g. - get a drink of water, stretch, breathe!).

Giving your testimony:

- ³⁵₁₇ Be brief and to the point.
- ³⁵₁₇ Use your own words.
- ³⁵₁₇ Speak slowly, clearly and loudly.
- ³⁵₁₇ Try not to read word for word.
- ³⁵₁₇ Keep your head up and make eye contact.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be positive and smile.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be courteous and respectful (e.g. - no personal attacks, name calling, or disrespectful language).
- ³⁵₁₇ Remember that you ARE an expert on the issue and that what you are saying is as important as everyone else testifying at the hearing.
- ³⁵₁₇ Offer to be a resource to the committee on the issue.
- ³⁵₁₇ Thank the elected officials who are at the hearing.

Questions you may get from legislators:

- ³⁵₁₇ Be honest and respond if you can.
- ³⁵₁₇ If you are unsure or do not know the answer, it is fine to tell the legislators that you will need to get back to them on the issue with the information.

Follow-up post-hearing:

- ³⁵₁₇ Write a short thank you note to legislators who attended the hearing.
- ³⁵₁₇ Include your key points in the note.
- ³⁵₁₇ Be sure to contact legislative staff to thank them and provide any answers to questions or follow up information.
- ³⁵₁₇ For additional information on testifying at a public hearing, contact your state legislature.

Preparing for a Vote

You just learned that your bill will be coming up for a vote in a legislative committee or before the entire Senate or House of Delegates/Representatives. What do you do?

- ³⁵/₁₇ Alert your allies, press contacts and organizational members about the vote.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Send an Action Alert asking citizens to call their legislators and ask them to vote for the bill or amendment.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Be prepared to offer data, personal stories and other information to legislators and members of the media about your bill.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Monitor the debate in the legislature and be ready to respond to concerns, questions, or opposition that may arise.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Whether you win or lose, be sure to communicate the final results to your allies.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Prepare a press release to express disappointment in a bad vote or gratitude for a successful one.
- ³⁵/₁₇ Be sure to thank everyone who worked on the bill with you, including legislative sponsors, organization allies and other stakeholders.

Sample Materials

Sample Action Alerts

URGENT ACTION ALERT: Protect Youth in the Justice System!

SIGN ON TO SUPPORT AB 272!

On March 15, 2017, Assemblywoman Lucy Flores of the Nevada Legislature introduced Assembly Bill 272. This bill will require that youth under 18 who are charged as adults be placed in juvenile detention facilities rather than adult jails. It will also raise the age at which youths may be tried as adults from 14 to 16 for certain offenses. This legislation will reduce the dangers youth face when detained in adult jails and will also reduce the likelihood that youth will reoffend by placing some youth in the juvenile justice system rather than in the adult criminal justice system. Please sign on to the attached letter to show your support for this crucial measure.

ATTEND THE HEARING ON SATURDAY!

The Assembly Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on AB 272 at 10:00 AM on Saturday, April 9, in Room 3138 of the Legislative Building (401 S. Carson Street, Carson City). Come to the hearing to support Assemblywoman Flores, to hear testimony from your fellow Nevadans, and to speak out in favor of AB 272. If you can't make it to Carson City, the hearing will be video conferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Ave, Las Vegas. Turnout is important to show that this bill matters to the people of Nevada, so please attend if you can! And, spread the word!

TESTIFY AT THE HEARING!

If you have a strong opinion on protecting youth under age 18 in the criminal justice system, know someone who has had experience with the justice system, or just want to participate in the debate, please consider testifying in support of AB 272. There's no advanced sign-in required to testify; all you need to do is show up to either location, sign in, and indicate that you wish to speak. Each speaker will have approximately 5 to 10 minutes. If you have exhibits or documents supporting your testimony, they must be submitted to asmjud@lcb.state.nv.us by 10:00 AM on Friday, so please plan accordingly. Even if you don't want to testify, come to the hearing to lend your support.

Thank you for your participation, and please forward this email to anyone who might be interested in signing the letter or attending the hearing.

[Insert contact information at the end of each Alert]

Sample Sign-on Letter

[Date]

[Insert Name/Organization]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Name]:

We are writing to urge you to support Assembly Bill No. 272, which would improve the treatment of youth under 18 in the criminal justice system.

Assembly Bill No. 272 will protect under-18 youth in the criminal justice system by ensuring that they are not placed in adult jails but held instead in appropriate juvenile facilities. The bill also promotes public safety because we know that children in the adult criminal justice system are more likely to reoffend than children who remain in the juvenile system.

Placing youth in adult jails also puts them at risk of assault and abuse. According to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission Report, youth incarcerated in adult facilities are the group most at risk of sexual assault. Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics confirm that under-18 youths comprise a disproportionately high percentage of victims of prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Some facilities “protect” these at-risk youth by placing them in solitary confinement, in which they are frequently locked down 23 hours a day in small cells with no natural light. These conditions can cause anxiety, paranoia, and exacerbate existing mental disorders, putting youth at increased risk for suicide.

Youth placed in adult jails have a much higher rate of suicide than their peers. Youth in adult jails are five times more likely to commit suicide than youth in juvenile detention facilities.

Youth prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system are much more likely to reoffend. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), at the U.S. Department of Justice, concluded that prosecuting youth as adults has little or no deterrent effect on juvenile crime and that youth prosecuted as adults are more likely to reoffend than youth in the juvenile justice system. A report released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed virtually identical results: 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, [Your name, title, organization]

Sample Testimony

**Testimony by Diana Gonzalez in support of H.B. 5782
March 13, 2006**

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 firsthand 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.

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, realizing this is all about money.

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, but 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 save money in the long run by spending it correctly in the beginning. It's about setting priorities and 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, and 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.

Sample Meeting Request Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [Insert Legislator's First and Last Name]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Legislator's Title and Last Name],

I have been a member of your district for [number] years, and I would like to share with you some concerns I have about the treatment of youth in the criminal justice system.

I oppose punitive legislation that would harm youth by sending them to the criminal justice system. In adult jails youth receive little to no education, receive few rehabilitative services, and face risk of assault, rape, and death. Investing in community-based alternatives to incarceration would be more effective for both youth and public safety.

On behalf of [your group], I would like to set up a brief meeting with you at your convenience over the next several weeks. I wish to discuss our group's position on the state's juvenile justice laws. I hope to have [list who will attend] join me in meeting as well.

I appreciate your consideration, and look forward to hearing from you about a possible meeting.

Sincerely,

[Your name, address, and phone number]

Sample Thank You Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [Insert Legislator's First and Last Name]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Legislator's Title and Last Name],

Thank you for meeting with me [and LIST OTHERS] about the juvenile justice policies in our community. I understand that you are a very busy person, and I appreciate you taking time out of your day to listen to my [our] concerns.

I look forward to continuing to work with you in the days and weeks ahead to address some of these concerns. Please contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

[Your Name, Organization, Address, and Phone Number]

Sample Talking Points

Reducing the “Prosecution” of Youth in Adult Criminal Court

- ³⁵₁₇ An estimated 200,000 youth are prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system every year, and nearly 95,000 youth are locked in adult jails or prisons every year.
- ³⁵₁₇ Youth prosecuted in adult criminal court may be placed in adult jails pre-trial, before they are even convicted.
- ³⁵₁₇ Youth in adult jails and prisons are subject to greater risks of violence and sexual assault than any other population.
- ³⁵₁₇ Youth sent to adult jails and prisons face greater risks of exacerbated emotional and mental health problems, including greater risks of suicide.
- ³⁵₁₇ Youth of color are disproportionately impacted by state transfer laws.
- ³⁵₁₇ Youth prosecuted in adult criminal court are subject to the same sentencing guidelines as adults, and may be subject to mandatory minimum sentences or life without parole.
- ³⁵₁₇ The consequences of an adult criminal conviction for youth are serious, negative, life-long, and severely impair youth chances at future success.
- ³⁵₁₇ Studies across the nation have consistently concluded that juvenile transfer laws are ineffective at deterring crime and reducing recidivism.
- ³⁵₁₇ The adult criminal justice system is not set up to adequately manage youth offenders.
- ³⁵₁₇ The public strongly supports investing in rehabilitative approaches to help youth - not prosecuting youth in adult court or placing youth in adult jails and prisons.
- ³⁵₁₇ Effective treatment programs reduce recidivism, and in turn, fewer tax dollars are spent sending youth back into the system.
- ³⁵₁₇ Recognizing the harmful effects of these laws, many states have implemented changes to reduce the prosecution of youth in adult court and limit the placement of youth in adult jails and prisons.
- ³⁵₁₇ Given the overwhelming evidence showing that we can better protect our youth and keep our communities safe by keeping children under juvenile court jurisdiction, now is the time to change state policies and reduce the prosecution of youth in adult criminal court.

Sample Fact Sheet

The provisions of AB 272 would improve the treatment of youths under 18 in the criminal justice system of Nevada. The bill prevents non-delinquent youth from being held in jails or detention facilities and raises the age at which a child may be tried as an adult to 16 for most crimes. It also forbids holding under-18 youth in adult jails or prisons unless no alternative facilities are available, in which case youths must be separated by sight and sound from adults. AB 272 limits the placement of allegedly delinquent children in detention centers prior to the disposition of their case and requires that under-18 youth being tried as adults be held in juvenile facilities until a verdict has been reached.

The legislature should approve AB 272 because:

- ³⁵₁₇ Placing youth in adult facilities greatly increases their risk of suicide. Youth in adult jails are five times more likely to commit suicide than youth in juvenile detention facilities.
- ³⁵₁₇ Placing youth into adult facilities greatly increases the risk that they will be harmed by others. Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics confirm that under-18 youths comprise a disproportionately high percentage of victims of prisoner-on-prisoner violence.
- ³⁵₁₇ Adult jails and prisons cannot adequately protect under-18 youth. In order to prevent violence or victimization, some adult jails separate youth from the general prison population by putting them into solitary confinement. Being locked down for most of the day in a small cell can cause anxiety and paranoia, and exacerbates existing mental disorders.
- ³⁵₁₇ Holding youths awaiting trial as adults in adult jail facilities is unnecessary. As many as half of the under-18 youths tried as adults will be sent back to the juvenile system. Putting these children in adult facilities while they await trial can be very damaging, and is ultimately unnecessary.
- ³⁵₁₇ Trying children as adults doesn't prevent crime. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the U.S. Department of Justice concluded that prosecuting youth as adults has little or no deterrent effect on juvenile crime.
- ³⁵₁₇ Putting children into adult jails and prisons makes everyone less safe. Studies have shown that youth who are transferred from the juvenile court system to the adult criminal system are 34% more likely to be rearrested than youth retained in the juvenile system.

Sample Media Advisory

Media Advisory
[Date]

Contacts:
[Name, Phone Number]

[State] Group Recognizes JJDPAs 35th Anniversary *Urges Congress to Strengthen Program's protections for children*

[City, State] On Wednesday, September 16, at 10 a.m., [Group] will host an event to commemorate the 35th Anniversary of our nation's landmark federal juvenile justice law. [Group] will join youth, parents, juvenile justice officials, and local leaders to recognize the success of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDPAs) and call on Congress to strengthen the law by reauthorizing it this year.

The JJDPAs Anniversary comes at an especially crucial time as nearly 10,000 youth are held in adult jails and prisons on any given day in the United States and over 100,000 youth are held in juvenile detention and correctional facilities.

At the event, [Speakers] will call on lawmakers, particularly [State] Senator [Name], to strengthen the JJDPAs by protecting children from the dangers of adult jails and prisons; improving safety for youth in custody; and increasing fairness in the juvenile justice system by requiring states to take steps to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Participants will also sign JJDPAs "Anniversary cards" to be delivered to Senator [Name], urging reauthorization of the JJDPAs this year. As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator [Name] will play a pivotal role in the JJDPAs debate.

WHAT: JJDPAs 35th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

WHEN: Wednesday, September 16 AT 10 A.M.

WHERE: Insert location

WHO: List names, titles and organizations of speakers

** All speakers available for interviews pre- or post-event.

Please contact [insert contact info] to schedule.

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Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release
[Date]

Contacts:
[Name, Phone Number]

[Group] Calls on Congress to Pass Juvenile Justice Bill *[Insert number] organizations urge increased protections for children in the justice system*

Note to Photo Editor: Digital Photos Available Upon Request

[City, State] - On the 35th Anniversary of enactment of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP), [Group] will join youth, parents, juvenile justice officials, and local leaders at [location] called on members of the [state's] Congressional delegation to approve legislation reauthorizing this landmark federal law to protect children and provide resources for vital juvenile justice programs.

"It is critical that Congress reauthorize the JJDP this year," says [Name] of [Organization]. "Our state's delegation is in a position to help increase protections for children in the justice system by keeping them out of adult jails and prisons, improving safety for children in custody, increasing fairness by reducing racial and ethnic disparities, and providing appropriate rehabilitative services through effective community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration this legislation."

Signed into law on September 7, 1974, and most recently authorized in 2002 with bipartisan support, the JJDP is based on a broad consensus that children, youth, and families involved with the juvenile and criminal courts should be guarded by federal standards for care and custody, while also upholding the interests of community safety and the prevention of victimization. The JJDP includes four core protections: keeping status offenders out of secure facilities, keeping youth out of adult facilities (with limited exceptions), separating those youth who are in adult facilities (under the limited exceptions) from adult offenders by both "sight" and "sound," and assessing and addressing the disproportionate contact that minority youth have with the justice system.

"The JJDP needs to be reauthorized now to protect children from the dangers of adult jails, improve safety for youth in custody, and to reduce racial disparities and increase fairness in the juvenile justice system," says [Name] of [Organization].

[Italicized Description of Sponsor Group/Coalition]

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