



New York Juvenile Justice Coalition

c/o Juvenile Justice Project of The Correctional Association of NY ■ 135 East 15th Street New York, NY 10003 212-254-5700

September 17, 2007

The Honorable Carolyn McCarthy
Chair
Healthy Families Subcommittee
106 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Yvette Clarke
1029 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCarthy and Representative Clarke:

On behalf of the Juvenile Justice Coalition, we are writing to express our support of the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act (JJJPA) scheduled for this year.

The Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC) is a network of child advocacy groups, legal service providers, alternative to detention programs, and community-based organizations. Together, we work to reduce the number of New York youth in jails and prisons; reduce the disproportionately high contact, adjudication, and incarceration of youth of color; ensure the due process of all court-involved youth; improve outcomes for young people confined in juvenile justice institutions; and promote a youth development approach to juvenile justice.

As you know, for more than 30 years the JJJPA has provided for a nationwide juvenile justice planning and advisory system which includes all U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. It apportions federal funding to improve state and local juvenile justice programs for improvement and for delinquency prevention. The JJJPA also provides for unique partnerships between governor-appointed State Juvenile Justice Advisory Groups and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJDP), a federal agency that is dedicated to supporting state and local efforts through training, technical assistance, model programs, and research and evaluation. All states must comply with the four core protections outlined in the JJJPA:

Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) applies to truants, runaways and curfew violators. This provision seeks to ensure that status offenders who have not committed a criminal offense are not held in secure adult facilities or in secure detention or adult facilities.

Adult Jail and Lock-Up Removal requires that youth cannot be detained in adult jails (with limited exceptions). The purpose of this provision is to keep children out of adult jails.

“Sight and Sound” Separation requires that in limited circumstances where youth can be placed in adult jails, that while in adult jails or lock-ups, “sight and sound” contact with adults is prohibited. This provision seeks to prevent youth from threats, intimidation, and other forms of psychological and physical abuse.

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) requires all states to focus on and assess the disproportionate contact of youth of color at all points in the justice system. Studies indicate that youth of color receive harsher sentences and are more likely to be incarcerated than white youth who are being tried for the same offenses. This provision is essential because, nationwide, youth of color only comprise one-third of the youth population but comprise two thirds of youth in contact with the juvenile justice system.

We urge you to ensure that the JJDPA is reauthorized this year and that any final JJDPA bill embodies the attached Act 4 Juvenile Justice campaign’s “Statement of Principles” signed by over 150 organizations nationwide. These principles are grounded in research and their efficacy underscored by the fact that the JJDPA has for more than three decades providing direction and support for juvenile justice system improvements and significantly contributing to the nationwide reduction in juvenile crime.

Reauthorizing the JJDPA this year and strengthening the JJDPA would help us to make substantial progress on these critical priorities throughout New York:

Promote the use of Alternatives to Incarceration and Detention. Although arrests for youth crime have decreased by 28% in the last 10 years, in 2006 the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) admitted 5,973 youth to juvenile detention centers. This was a 14% increase from the previous year. In New York City, in FY2006, the average annual cost for one youth in secure detention was \$170,820. A 2006 study by the NYC Independent Budget Office found that the Esperanza program and the Enhanced Supervision Program (ESP), two alternative-to-detention programs, saved New York City almost \$5 million in reduced incarceration costs that year. The Esperanza program costs less than \$15,000 per youth annually, and ESP has an annual cost of less than \$5,000 per youth.

Reduce Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System. In 2005, 86% of the youth in the NY State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facilities were African-American, Latino, or American Indian. Fifty-five percent of the youth admitted to secure detention come from New York City’s poorest neighborhoods. In 2003, African-American youth were detained at a rate 4.5 times higher than whites, while Latino youth were detained at twice the rate of white youth.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working closely with you on these efforts. Please don’t hesitate to let us know if you have any questions or would like additional information. We can be reached through Mishi Faruqee at the Correctional Association of New York at (212) 254-5700.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruben Austria
Senior Director, Bronx Connect
Urban Youth Alliance

Ana Bermudez
Director, Juvenile Justice Programs
Children's Aid Society

Joel Copperman
Executive Director
Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services

Mishi Faruqee
Director, Juvenile Justice Project
Correctional Association of New York

Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald
Executive Director
Justice Works Community

Elizabeth Gaynes
Executive Director
Osborne Association

Rev. Joyce Hartwell
Chair, the Justice Task Force
ARISE Coalition

Susan Hazeldean
Staff Attorney, Peter Cicchino Youth Project
Urban Justice Center

Margo Hirsch
Executive Director
Empire State Coalition for Children and Families

Jennifer March-Joly
Acting Executive Director
Citizens Committee for Children

Benita Miller
Executive Director
Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective

Beth Navon
Executive Director
Friends of Island Academy

Elizabeth O'Connor
Director, Juvenile Justice Program
DOME Project

Andre Pabon
Senior Director
Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City

Laurie Parise
Executive Director
Youth Represent

Victoria Sammartino
Executive Director
Voices Unbroken

Rev. Maria Isabel Santiviago
Bishop's Vicar
Mission San Juan Bautista

Isis Sapp-Grant
Executive Director
Youth Empowerment Mission

Tamara Steckler
Attorney-in-Charge, Juvenile Rights Practice
Legal Aid Society

Robin Steinberg
Executive Director
Bronx Defenders

Liz Sullivan
Education Program Director
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

Chris Tan
Director, Juvenile Justice Project
Advocates for Children

Angela Tolosa
Project Director
Midtown Community Court

Marsha Weissman
Executive Director
Center for Community Alternatives