

November 6, 2017

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Senate Judiciary Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, in support of the passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2017.

For decades, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) has provided protections for young people in the juvenile justice system. The introduction in 1974 was critical to the implementation of minimum national standards to address the egregious treatment of children and youth entering the justice system. The JJDP also created the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to be responsible for providing funding, technical assistance, and research to juvenile justice programs across the nation. Unfortunately, the bill was last reauthorized in 2002 and expired in 2007.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2017 extends the authorization of the 1974 statute to ensure funding for states that adhere to four key protections: deinstitutionalization of status offenders, sight and sound separation, adult jail and lockup removal, and disproportionate minority contact. In addition, this bill encourages accountability and requires states to provide information to assure compliance with the core protections. It also requires an evaluation by the Attorney General of the amount of funds that were granted to states that did not comply with the JJDP's requirements.

We are encouraged to see this bi-partisan legislation has been updated to reflect the latest research for best practices regarding at-risk youth, including an emphasis on evidence based programs to reduce recidivism. Additionally, community based alternatives and increased awareness of mental health issues will have a significant impact on the number of kids unnecessarily locked up for minor offenses. Many young people who are involved with the justice system have been exposed to trauma, abuse and neglect. They are vulnerable and in need of greater screening and extensive services including trauma-informed counseling, substance abuse treatment and housing assistance. Therefore, we are opposed to the language that will allow for minors to be locked up due to a status offense that violates a valid court order. We encourage a final passage of this bill that does not hold exceptions to the rule of deinstitutionalization for status offenders.

As an organization committed to the well-being and safety of all children in the United States we urge the passage of this important legislation. We are confident that implementing these best practices and latest research results will benefit both the children and youth who are at risk of entering the juvenile court system, and those who have already entered the system. We also believe it will help make our communities safer and healthier.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President