

NATIONAL RESOLUTION

Regarding trying and sentencing youth offenders in adult criminal court

WHEREAS policies and practices providing “adult time for adult crime” are often harmful—rather than helpful—to community safety, as evidenced by research demonstrating that prosecuting juveniles in the adult criminal system increases rather decreases the likelihood that they will re-offend, as compared with handling them in the juvenile justice system;

WHEREAS, 75% of youth under age 18 sent to adult facilities will be released by the age of 22 and most will have been denied adequate education, mental health treatment, drug treatment and employment skills training;

WHEREAS trying and sentencing youth in adult court is not reserved for the most serious, chronic and violent juvenile offenders, but inappropriately includes more than half of the cases involving only nonviolent drug and property crimes;

WHEREAS there exist serious human rights concerns, as well as physical and emotional health concerns, when youth held in adult facilities are sexually assaulted five times more often, commit suicide eight times more often, and are assaulted with a weapon 50% more often than youth held in juvenile facilities;

WHEREAS there exist serious civil rights concerns given that youth of color are disproportionately represented in cases sent to adult court—as shown in 18 of the largest court jurisdictions where 82% of juvenile cases filed in adult court involved youth of color;

WHEREAS research continues to establish and reaffirm that the adolescent brain—particularly the part that makes judgments, reins in impulsive behavior and engages in moral and ethical reasoning—is not fully developed until age 19 or 20, laying the foundation for laws that prohibit youth under age 18 from taking on major adult responsibilities such as voting, jury duty and military service;

WHEREAS the use of statutes or procedures that automatically exclude youth from the juvenile court without an assessment of individual circumstances deny them basic fairness;

WHEREAS more than 250,000 offenders under the age of 18 are sent each year to adult criminal courts across the United States, including an estimated 218,000 excluded from juvenile court jurisdiction, not because of the severity of their crimes, nor because they are habitual violent offenders, but because states have lowered the age of adulthood in the criminal code;

BE IT RESOLVED that the national organizations listed herein will work to build broad acceptance for reform, as well as to create reform, in state policies and practices, so as to significantly reduce the number of youth sent to adult criminal court and to ensure that young offenders are appropriately adjudicated in ways that enhance community safety and vitality.

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

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The following organizations, representing and serving millions of children, youth and families across the United States, proudly stand together in support of the National Resolution regarding trying and sentencing youth offenders in adult criminal court.

Alliance for Children and Families

Federation of Families for Children's
Mental Health

American Academy of Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry

Forum for Youth Investment

American Academy of Pediatrics

Justice Policy Institute

American Probation and Parole
Association

Juvenile Justice Center, Suffolk
University Law School

American Society for Adolescent
Psychiatry

Juvenile Law Center

American Youth Policy Forum

Legal Action Center

Campaign 4 Youth Justice

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

National Association of Criminal
Defense Lawyers

Children's Defense Fund

National Association of School
Psychologists

Child Welfare League of America

National Association of Social Workers

Church Women United

National Collaboration for Youth

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

National CURE

Council for Children with Behavioral
Disorders

National HIRE Network

Covenant House

National Juvenile Defender Center

Critical Resistance

National Mental Health Association

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

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National Network for Youth

Society for Adolescent Medicine

National Network of State Juvenile
Justice Collaborations

Southern Poverty Law Center

National Youth Employment Coalition

The Sentencing Project

Physicians for Human Rights

United Church of Christ Justice and
Witness Ministries

Presbyterian Church USA

Youth Law Center

Reclaiming Futures

School Social Work Association of
America

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Coalition for Juvenile Justice