



June 16, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
530 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
135 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Senator Whitehouse:

We, the undersigned—representing more than 80 national, state, and local organizations and hundreds of thousands of constituents—thank you for your leadership in sponsoring S. 1169, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2015. The bill strengthens and updates the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), which has provided States and localities with federal standards and supports for improving juvenile justice and delinquency prevention practices and contributed to safeguards for youth, families and communities for more than 40 years, and we are grateful that you have made it a priority this Congress.

Despite a continuing decline in youth crime and delinquency, more than 60,000 young people are held in detention centers awaiting trial or confined by the courts in juvenile facilities in the U.S. For these confined youth, and the many more kids at-risk of involvement in the justice system, the JJDP and programs it supports are critical. Youth who are locked up are separated from their families, and many witness violence. These youth struggle when they get out, trying to complete high school, get jobs, housing, or go to college. Aside from the human toll, the financial costs of maintaining large secure facilities have also made it vital to rethink juvenile justice in every community.

Premised on research-based understandings of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, S. 1169 reaffirms a national commitment to the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system; one that supports developmentally appropriate practices that treat as many youth as possible in their communities. It advances important improvements to the JJDP, its core requirements and its central purposes, provides enhanced safeguards for youth in the system, increases community safety, and ensures progress toward racial fairness.

Since the last JJDP reauthorization was approved in 2002, there have been many developments in the field of juvenile justice that significantly impact practitioners' work. S. 1169 recognizes and addresses many of these developments in several key ways. Specifically, we are pleased that the bill:

1. Strengthens the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) core requirement by calling on states to phase-out use of the Valid Court Order Exception that currently causes non-offending youth/status offenders to be locked up.

2. Extends the adult Jail Removal and Sight and Sound Separation core requirements to apply to juveniles held pretrial, whether charged in juvenile or adult court.
3. Gives States and localities clear direction on the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) protection to plan and implement data-driven approaches to ensure fairness and reduce racial and ethnic disparities, to set measurable objectives for reduction of disparities in the system, and to publicly report such efforts.
4. Encourages States to eliminate dangerous practices in confinement and to promote adoption of best practices and standards.
5. Recognizes the impact of exposure to violence and trauma on adolescent behavior and development.
6. Encourages investment in community-based alternatives to detention; encourages family engagement in design and delivery of treatment and services; improves screening, diversion, assessment, and treatment for mental health and substance abuse needs; allows for easier transfer of education credits for system-involved youth; and calls for a focus on the particular needs of girls either in the system or at risk of entering the justice system.
7. Promotes fairness by supporting State efforts to expand youth access to counsel and encouraging programs that inform youth of opportunities to seal or expunge juvenile records once they have gotten their lives back on track.
8. Reauthorizes the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) program which helps states and localities reduce juvenile offending by providing judges and other juvenile justice officials with a range of age/developmentally-appropriate options to both hold youth accountable and get them back on track so they are less likely to reoffend.
9. Encourages transparency, timeliness, public notice, and communication on the part of OJJDP, its agents and the States.
10. Increases accountability to ensure effective use of resources, to provide greater oversight of grant programs, and to ensure state compliance with federal standards.

Given the significant gains reflected in S. 1169, we are pleased to endorse the bill and look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues toward final passage in the 114th Congress.

Respectfully submitted,
(in alphabetical order)

National, State, and Regional Organizations

Campaign for Youth Justice
Coalition for Juvenile Justice