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U. S. House Approves Bipartisan Bill to Strengthen Federal Juvenile Justice Law

Passage Comes Same Day President Trump Releases FY18 Budget Proposal

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the U.S. House of Representatives approved by voice vote, H.R. 1809, bipartisan legislation to strengthen and update the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP A).

Signed into law by President Gerald Ford on September 7, 1974, and most recently reauthorized in 2002, the JJDP A embodies a partnership between the federal government and the U.S. states, territories and the District of Columbia to protect children and youth in the juvenile and criminal justice system, to effectively address high-risk and delinquent behavior and to improve community safety.

“Today’s historic action by the U.S. House of Representatives reaffirms Congress’ bi-partisan commitment to this successful law, which – for more than 40 years – has set out national standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system and provides direction and support for state juvenile justice system improvements that help advance public safety,” said Naomi Smoot, Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and Co-chair of the Act4JJ Campaign.

The bill was introduced on April 4, 2017, by Rep. Jason Lewis (R-MN) and Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA) and is co-sponsored by Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-MN) and 20 other members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate’s version of the bill, S. 860, has been introduced and is sponsored by Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI); they are joined by 9 other bipartisan co-sponsors.

Earlier today, President Donald Trump released, “A New Foundation for American Greatness,” his 2018 budget proposal. Overall, the proposed budget dramatically cuts discretionary funding and safety nets to vulnerable children and families.

Federal support of key juvenile justice programs has declined to the lowest levels in more than a decade, effecting states’ ability to serve youth. While cuts to federal juvenile justice programs have slowed in recent years, the President’s budget further reduces overall spending on juvenile justice from \$273 million in FY17 to \$229.5 million for FY18¹.

“The importance of the continued federal investment in children and families cannot be overstated,” said Marcy Mistrett, CEO at the Campaign for Youth Justice and Co-chair of the Act4JJ Coalition, “Over the past decade, this critical federal-state partnership on juvenile justice reform has helped states reduce our over-reliance on youth incarceration, support children in their homes, and communities, and invest in proven strategies that improve public safety. As a result, youth crime is at its lowest in four decades.”

While juvenile justice funding didn’t suffer the extent of cuts that other critical federal programs face, the overall budget proposal is cause for concern. Programs that serve some of our nation’s most vulnerable children and youth in the justice system are aligned with other federal discretionary programs that are being subject to harsh cuts; programs that help prevent children from coming in contact with the law. These cuts threaten the progress that our nation has made on behalf of children and puts children at risk.

For more information go to www.ACT4JJ.org

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About Act 4 Juvenile Justice - *Act 4 Juvenile Justice (ACT4JJ) is a campaign of the National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (NJJDPC), which represents over 80 national organizations who work on youth development and juvenile justice issues. ACT4JJ is composed of juvenile justice, child welfare and youth development organizations advocating for the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) and increased federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services.*

¹ <https://www.justice.gov/file/969001/download>