

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

FAMILIES IN POWER



FAMILY GUIDE TO NETWORKING

COALITION BUILDING



ORGANIZING & CAMPAIGN PLANNING

www.campaignforyouthjustice.org

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Dear Parents and Families,

On behalf of the Campaign for Youth Justice, a national campaign dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating children under 18 in the adult criminal justice system, we would like to share some tips on organizing a movement of families and loved ones of those incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.

Successful campaigns have been waged across the US to reform the juvenile and criminal justice systems. We, at the Campaign, believe that more of these campaigns are needed if we are to achieve a system based on true justice, fairness, best practice and racial equality. We know that the practice of mass incarceration is an expensive and ineffective way of handling the social ills of our country and that change is desperately needed. The question is: how do we make that change happen?

This guide is intended to help answer that question for families and loved ones of those who have seen their child locked up. It is important for you and your family to understand that your voice is the **most important** if changes are to be made that will provide better outcomes for us, for our children and ultimately our communities as a whole. My experience in reforming the juvenile justice system in Louisiana has shown me that parent voices and the voices and needs of our children are often misinterpreted and/or based on poor information. Sometimes parents are completely ignored by well-meaning individuals working within the bureaucracies of systems who believe they know what is best for us and our children. **As parents and families, we are the experts on our children.** We may need guidance and/or assistance but we are the ones with the greatest influence when it comes to our own children.

Organizing our families and communities is an incredibly effective tool in a successful campaign for change. Indeed, organizing can provide sustainable change capable of providing support and assistance to individuals but also increased awareness of needed systemic change and reform. This guide strives to engage as many people as possible and gives you many ways to join the movement for change whether you have 10 minutes or an hour to spend on the work. The important thing is to find something you can do and make it happen.

You will not be alone in your effort to build a campaign against the practice of trying children as adults. The Campaign is dedicated to ending this practice and helping those that are in the field as they work on this important issue. As you make your way through the guide and the actions contained here, please do not hesitate to call on us for assistance and guidance.

Sincerely,

Grace Bauer, Field Organizer
Campaign For Youth Justice





Community organizing is a long-term approach where the people affected by an issue are supported in identifying problems and taking action to achieve solutions. The organizer challenges those he or she works with to change the way things are—it is a means of achieving social change through collective action by changing the balance of power.

~ one of many definitions of Community Organizing

Where to Begin

How much time do I have to spend on this?

What do I hope to accomplish?

Assessment Phase

It is important to organize, but it is even more important to organize **strategically**. To be strategic you have to figure out where you are today. The following questions should help you to assess your situation.

What are the laws regarding transfer in my state and/or county? Get a copy of the law/laws and familiarize yourself with what it says, how it works and who created it. You can find this information by calling your local public defender office or by going to www.ncjj.org

- Who makes the decisions about such cases? Is it an individual judge, a particular court or a certain law? The law should spell this out.
- Are there others in my area working on this issue? Others that may be working on this could include specialists and advocates for special education, mental health, child protection, and juvenile justice. If you find other groups with similar concerns to yours, sign up for their mailings, email list and newsletters so that you can stay informed about their work and also so that you have access to information updates on transfer issues. These organizations and individuals can become your allies. Try looking at <http://www.cfyj.org/find-your-state-contacts.html> or <http://www.cfyj.org/partners.html>
- Who is the opposition? In another words, who believes these transfer laws are effective and are advocates for keeping them in place? Who might oppose your efforts?
- What do I know about the research and evidence on transfer laws? Take the time to read the fact sheets provided by the Campaign for Youth Justice on transfer laws and the impact of this practice on our children and on public safety. See the **Suggested Reading List** at the end of this guide.

Let's Get Organized

Your first question may be, “Where do I find others to help me?” That’s a great question and a perfect place to begin the work of organizing. You will want to look for the organizations and groups mentioned in the Assessment Phase of this guide and take advantage of the opportunities they provide, but you will also want to find others like yourself who are currently or formerly involved in the system. This puts you in a great position to start talking with and recruiting others. Organizing doesn’t have to happen separately from what you are already doing, you just need to be prepared to do it as the opportunity presents itself.

Preparations

- Bring a notebook for writing down people’s contact information
- Have your contact information ready to hand to others
- One page fact sheet on transfer issues with you at all times
- Create a flyer with contact information, a few facts about transfer and what needs to be changed

Where to go . . .

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- ✓ Courthouse (juvenile and adult)
- ✓ Detention centers, jails and prisons (find out when the facilities have visitation days)
- ✓ Daily stops (grocery store, salon, church and other civic organizations)
- ✓ Representative or senator
- ✓ Children’s advocacy groups
- ✓ Health units or health care centers
- ✓ Mental health care providers’ advocacy organizations
- ✓ Community-based service providers directly involved with families and youth
- ✓ Special education advocacy centers
- ✓ Schools (don’t forget alternative schools)
- ✓ Local politicians (county boards, city councils, etc...)
- ✓ Online communities (Facebook, My Space, etc...)



Now you have your materials ready, and you know where to go. The next step is figuring out what you want to say to people. Always consider who your audience is and what message you are trying to share with them. Develop your rap; your rap is essentially your 30-second commercial based on your belief that children should not go to adult jails or have adult convictions.

Talking to Other Parents

My Rap... "My son was involved in the system and there are other alternatives to building a new, very expensive prison. The facts are that a very small percentage of juveniles are convicted of violent felonies and that most of them would do much better given care and treatment in their own communities. Prisons are not the answer."

Below is a scenario that might give you some ideas of how to share your message and recruit another parent to work with you. Talking to other families can seem like a daunting task. I was always worried about invading people's privacy at a difficult time but I have found that most families are happy to hear from others in similar situations. It is reassuring to folks to know they are not alone. The adult and juvenile justice systems are usually not family friendly environments and an offer of support or guidance is most often well received.

It may also help you practice talking to other families, and hopefully it can help you become comfortable in the Organizer's role.

Setting: It's Monday morning in juvenile court. There are at least 30 parents waiting with their children, some of whom will be transferred to adult court and possibly receive a sentence in an adult prison or jail. You know no one, but you have one big advantage on your side: you have been here before.

Shanta is a parent organizer whose son is now in prison and Gina is a mother waiting with her son.

Shanta: I hate that they call us all in here at one time and then make us wait all day before we go in front of the judge.

Gina: I know. The last time I was here, we were the last ones to be seen, I was late picking my other kids up from school.

Shanta: I hear the kids with lawyers are the first to go in. My son didn't have a lawyer so we were always the last ones in.

Gina: Where's your son now?

Shanta: He is locked up in a prison in North Dakota. He was charged as an adult and is now serving his time a long way from home. It sure makes it hard to stay in touch with him, let alone be of any kind of help to him and participate in his care.

Gina: So why are you here waiting with the rest of us?

Shanta: When my son got in trouble I started looking for help and answers but getting any information was really hard. After he went away I thought maybe I could help others by telling them what I have learned. I come up here when I can and talk to other parents and share information that I think they may be able to use to help their own child.

Gina: I could sure use some information to help my son...

It's not that hard to strike up a conversation with others, although it is always important to respect other's privacy in these settings. Use your judgment on this and keep in mind how you felt when you were there. Next, you need to follow up with this new contact. You can call to see how court went for her son and then take the time to share information that could be helpful to her situation. You may want to ask for her email address and send her any information about upcoming meetings in your community pertaining to juvenile justice or transfer issues. Before the day of the meeting call and ask her if she would like to go with you. Of course, this is an ideal scenario: there are people who don't want to talk with you, and that's ok, too.

A few rules to remember:

- Respect people's privacy
- Leave contact information (tomorrow they may wonder how to find you)
- Never make promises you can't keep
- No two situations are ever exactly alike, and people have a right to their feelings
- You are looking for the people that are looking for you; not everyone will be

A Success Story

In 2001, when my own son became involved in the juvenile justice system in Louisiana, I felt very alone and felt there was no place to turn for either help or information. The further into the system we went and the more information I gathered, the more I realized the serious need for a place for parents and family members to access such information. I was fortunate to find an advocacy group working on juvenile justice matters in Louisiana and through that organization another group emerged called Families and

Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FLLIC). FLLIC became the point of access for the information and assistance I had searched for in the beginning. The organization didn't have a lot of money or resources, and in fact, its greatest asset was the knowledge and strength of its members. What began as a handful of parents coming together for support became one of the most powerful advocacy organizations in Louisiana and a leader in juvenile justice reform.



Unfortunately, for my family, FFLIC was based in New Orleans, some 3 ½ hours away from my home. It soon became clear that we needed chapters of the organization around the state. It became my passion to see a strong chapter of FFLIC in Southwest Louisiana where I lived. In the very beginning there were just a few parents that got together on a regular basis to provide support and guidance to each other. After the first few meetings it was evident that people not only wanted support, but they wanted to take action and to help others. Our first step was to begin talking to other parents we met facing similar circumstances. Then we

began printing out meeting notices and posting them around in places like the courthouse and detention center. Before long we had new people coming to every meeting and more folks wanting to make a difference.

Out of the 5 original people that chapter grew into hundreds of members working on tough issues in our local area. We fought to make sure parent voices were involved at every decision-making table that had anything to do with our children including education, racism, policing policies, poverty and community-based programming. It was organizing that made this possible and made us a powerful voice to be reckoned with. More information about FFLIC and its ally organizations can be found at www.fflic.org



Members of FFLIC testify in front of the Senate.

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children's (FFLIC) story of success impacted many families and individual children but it is also noteworthy that the work of this organization had a tremendous impact on the way the state of Louisiana worked with its most vulnerable population and handled juvenile justice cases. The audience we reached in Louisiana ranged from parents of children suspended and expelled from the school system all the way to the governor. We had a variety of messages designed to meet people, whether professionals or parents, where they were. Reforming Louisiana's juvenile justice system was not high on anyone's

priority list in 2000, despite the fact that we had the highest incarceration rate and one of the worst juvenile prisons in the country. Organizing, parent and youth testimony, a lawsuit and various other strategies made it a top priority, one that refused to be silenced and swept under the proverbial rug. The success was not achieved overnight; instead, it came through the building of relationships with families and allies across the state into a wave of reform that could not be stopped. Again, ask yourself what you hope to achieve and consider the best way to get there from where you are now.

Messaging

Your message should be brief and on point. In the media and with people you meet, seconds count, so do this ahead of time and rehearse. Your message should come out as easily as giving someone your name.

For example, if I speaking with a Senator or Representative, I might say: “Hi, my name is Grace Bauer and I work for the Campaign for Youth Justice. I work on behalf of children charged as adults, a practice that does not promote public safety or reduce crime. My own son was charged as an adult when he was still a child, and the implications have been devastating to him and our family. This year there will be a bill in the legislature to limit this practice. I would like to set up an appointment to discuss this with you and possibly get your support for the bill.”

There is a guide on our website to assist with crafting media messages and to help people understand the value of designing a strong media message. The Media Guide is brief, but the lessons learned from years of this work are definitely worth reading. The Media Guide can be found at: <http://www.cfyj.org/documents/mediaguide2010.html>

Tactics

Our country has a rich and successful history of organizing to achieve a better life for ourselves and others. Beginning with the labor movements that brought us better working conditions, through the civil rights workers of 60's that changed the face of racial inequality in this country, to the very powerful women's movement, we have all reaped a reward or two from those that came before us. Today, we have to our advantage all of the lessons that have been learned and passed down from one group to the next.

The following is a list of some of the tactics that have been used successfully to change what is wrong and make it right:

- Face-to-face visits
- Public/community forums
- Candidate forums
- Rallies
- Vigils
- Letter writing/post card campaigns
- Block parties
- Flyer and tabling at community events
- Knocking on doors
- Coalition building/relationship building
- Media campaigns
- Petitions
- Workshops



While all of these tactics will help spread your message and likely recruit new members and allies, some take less work than others. Face-to-face visits with other parents is one of the first and most important steps you can take to begin organizing. In my work with FFLIC, folks often said that the main reason they came to a meeting and stayed in the organization was because they felt they had a relationship with one of the organizers or other members. Getting to know others and finding out what they believe, what their experience has been and what strengths they bring, are priceless assets in organizing. Coalition building with other organizations is another incredible tool. It can be hard work putting together many voices around one table, but it can also be one of your strongest assets. In successful campaigns people have to be willing to hear and work diligently on all strategies that can work, even if some ideas or some people don't mesh perfectly with the rest. If you exclude someone who cares about the cause, you can unwittingly alienate important voices and you detract from building your movement.



FFLIC Members rally at Louisiana State Capitol

If you go to community events, bring your own materials and share your message. First you will be educating others about transfer issues, and second, you will likely recruit others that hear your message. At some point, after you have built up capacity, you may want to hold your own community events, such as vigils, protests, rallies and workshops. In the meantime, take an hour a week to spend at events and meetings held by other organizations and work to build a network with both the organizations and other people attending these events. With this method, you are gaining ground by adding to your strengths and capacity.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but it may be exhausting! There is enough here to keep you busy for a long time. Need a place to start? Call us at the Campaign for Youth Justice for technical assistance, materials and to talk with someone "who has been there and done that." Look at our tool kits and guides provided on our website for step-by-step details on how to get started.

Remember...

"A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

~ Margaret Mead

Coalition building and networking are crucial to strong organizing, movement building and campaigns. The term, “the more the better”, certainly applies to building a successful campaign for reform of transfer laws and policies. It is with this in mind that we have created this guide to help you, in your area, to build a strong group of allies that can provide capacity, assistance, new ideas and other paths to success.

Coalition building and networking are two different strategies, but with much the same goals. A successful campaign needs many allies, lots of resources and plenty of team work. Let’s take a look at the two.

Networking

Networking is the process or practice of building up and maintaining informal relationships, especially with people whose friendship could bring advantages such as job or business opportunities. Networking on social justice issues is slightly different in that you are not building or maintaining relationships for job advantages or business opportunities, but instead to

- 1) increase the awareness of the public and**
- 2) organize more people in order to bring change.**

The relationships built through networking may be one of the best ways to strengthen your campaign. Networking can happen anywhere: the train, the grocery store, the hair/nail salon, meetings, or church. You begin by talking; it is that simple. Depending on the situation, you can choose your rap. In my time as an organizer, I have given presentations at the place where I get my hair cut, to the members of the PTA group at my children’s school, an organization of small business members where I went for information about a business I co-owned, and other places I encountered in my day-to-day life.

The reason I was asked to talk to the employees of the salon was a show on the salon television about kids in trouble. Of course, the news piece only covered one side of the story and made it seem like these were children that no one cared for. I took the opportunity to say, “My son was involved in the system and there are other alternatives to building a new, very expensive prison. The facts are that a very small percentage of juveniles are convicted of violent felonies and that most of them would do much better given care and treatment in their own communities. Prisons are not the answer.”

This one statement led to other people asking questions about how I knew about this and they invited me back the next week to tell them about my son. Almost every one of the employees knew someone who had a child in trouble and they brought friends and family members with them. I was able to provide information to help the people that had children in trouble and I was also able to garner the help of other folks.

Where do you network?

- Juvenile justice meetings
- Criminal justice meetings
- Legislator convening
- School board meetings
- County board meetings
- Resource Fairs
- Children’s issues gatherings



This is networking at its most basic. You will remember that the definition tells us we must build and maintain the relationships. To maintain these particular relationships I did two things 1) I left flyers and my business cards on a little table and with every hair cut I made sure to leave more, and 2) I followed up with the parents and families that had asked specific questions of me. I made referrals to other places that could help them with their individual situations and I made calls to make sure that they were helped. I called to check to see how things were going and I invited them to join our organization. All of these things helped to build relationships with folks and also spread the message.

Another good opportunity for networking is at meetings focused on juvenile justice issues. Perhaps in your community the juvenile detention group holds a monthly or quarterly meeting. Call the detention center and ask to be included on their email list so you know when those meetings happen and where. It is advisable to observe a meeting or two before jumping in. Sometimes you must request to be added to their agenda, so find out if you need to submit a request ahead of time. The best way to find out what is going on is to listen and ask questions. Pay attention to who is in the room. Are there other families or youth present? What organizations are at the table? Who is in charge? You may want to call the person in charge and ask what their stand on transfer is and if they do any work on this issue.

The next step you can take is to follow up with other groups in the room. If there were mental health advocates at the table, call and make an appointment to find out what they do and what their beliefs are about “adulthood.” Share your beliefs and why you feel the way you do. This organization may become your ally and they may be able to send other families to you. Make sure you leave your flyers and business cards with them. Ask if they hold workshops, perhaps you can give a presentation or training for some of their members or clients. Most importantly, ask about other people or organizations they know that might be affected by transfer laws.

Networking and relationship building are essential to successful campaigns, whether you build 3 relationships or 100. Although your focus may be on changing a piece of legislation, the relationships you develop along the way will be crucial to your success.

A few tips for networking:

- ✓ You are looking for the people that are looking for you.
- ✓ Do what you say you will, without fail.
- ✓ Don't promise what you yourself can't deliver.
- ✓ Be friendly, courteous, and aware of other people's time.
- ✓ Don't compromise your beliefs.
- ✓ Don't knock others.
- ✓ Always share your contact information.
- ✓

Coalition Building

The Midwest Academy Manual for Activists defines coalition as an organization of organizations working together for a common goal. The Manual also states, “Coalitions are not built because it is good, moral, or nice to get everyone working together. Coalitions are about building power.”

Working in larger groups can be tough; organizations will be unequal in terms of the capacities of their people and resources; there are bound to be differences in how all of these organizations work; and many other issues are likely to arise. Clarifying the goals of the coalition early on can help ease tensions later. Then, when you run into the inevitable disagreements, you can remind folks, “We are all here for the same purpose, to keep kids out of adult courts, jail and prisons, despite our differences”.

Where do I find others for my Coalition?

The best place to start is by looking online at the Campaign for Youth Justice’s website at www.CampaignForYouthJustice.org. We have a list of partners and advocacy groups that are working on this issue. Those partners may not include everyone with a stake in transfer laws and policies, but they are a good starting place. You can begin attending their meetings to get yourself up to date on what is happening and what else there is to do.

When visiting the Campaign’s website, you may notice that we also have allies at the national level. Investigate to see if there are local affiliates of the national organizations operating in your community. It can be helpful to share that the national organization is working in partnership with the Campaign on changing transfer policies and laws.

COALITIONS ARE A PLUS



+ MORE PEOPLE=MORE POWER

+ MORE EXPERTISE

+ MORE RESOURCES

+ MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Transfer policies affect children of color most often; look around your community for organizations that are working on racial justice and equity, Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC), issues affecting communities of color, etc... These groups may not be specifically looking at this issue, but with a little networking and education they may become your allies. The same can be said for children’s advocacy groups. Help them to understand how detrimental this practice is to children and what can be done to change it. Ask that they join you to get the message out and ask if they know others that might be interested in this issue.



Establishing a Coalition

A good starting point is to establish a Statement of Principles. A Statement of Principles defines an organization's intentions of meeting its environmental, financial, and social responsibilities. When working with other organizations, it is helpful to have your own principles and mission (if possible) firmly established. You can usually go on an organization's website and see both. You can also use others as examples to create your own.

The important point here is to be clear regarding where you stand and what you believe before beginning the work with others. If you are not ready to build an organization you can also team up with other organizations, you just want to make sure to have your principles to provide a foundation, or you run the risk of getting pulled in too many other issues and directions. From there you can begin the outreach necessary to gather allies.

One group of people that may already be established in your community is the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative or JDAI. JDAI is an initiative organized by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to help communities reduce reliance on incarceration and use alternatives to detention. It has been very successful in many jurisdictions around the country, in part because it engages multiple stakeholders. Many JDAI sites have working groups that can be ideal places to both gather information and find allies. You can find more information about JDAI on their website at www.aecf.org.

Campaign Planning

Now you have a few people organized, what do you do? The next step is figuring out exactly what you hope to achieve; you need a goal or goals. Coming up with goals is pretty straightforward work. There are a couple ways of going about it, and you should judge which way works best for your group. If you are still working at this alone, ask yourself, "What do I want to see happen?" If you have a larger group to work with, try using a brainstorming session to answer this question. Just grab butcher block paper and markers and begin a discussion with your group by asking what they would like to see accomplished. Ask someone to serve as the scribe and write down all answers. There is no wrong answer. Don't debate the merits of a goal or explain at this point. Simply encourage the free flow of ideas. Write down everyone's suggestions.

Hopefully, you will come out with a good list of ideas. Now, as a group you must begin to see what is possible. The Campaign Planning Chart (provided from the Midwest Academy Manual for Activists) below can help you realize what you know, what information you need to gather, and what might be the best strategy given your resources.

Goal	Allies	Targets	Opposition	Strategies	Resources	Actions

Since you have already chosen a goal or two to work with, let's walk through the rest of it.

Sample Goal: (goal #1): to change the transfer law in Louisiana that makes it possible for children charged with certain crimes to be tried as adults (also known as the Vitter Bill, named after the legislator who created it). You can use the brainstorming method to get everyone's ideas up on the chart.

1. Who are our allies on this matter?

Allies:

- Other parents and family members whose children have been tried as adults under this law
- Individuals who may have been affected by this law
- Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)
- Families Helping Families (disability rights advocacy organization)
- Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL)
- Innocence Project
- Louisiana CURE
- LA Federation of Families
- Agenda for Children (child advocacy group)
- Senators and Representative (hopefully they will be our allies and they are also our targets)



2. Who are our targets, that is, who are the change agents who can give us what we want?

Targets (also known as change agents):

- Legislature- members of the
- Though it is likely a few key legislators who hold the power and these should be listed specifically - e.g. leadership (who have the power to set the agenda), committee chairs (such as judiciary), and members of important caucuses (e.g. Black Caucus)

3. Who would like to see this law remain in place?

Opposition

- District attorneys
- District attorney association
- Sheriffs
- Sheriff's association
- Crime victim advocacy group

4. What needs to happen to change the law?

Tools:

- **Legislator education**- educating the voting body of the legislature on what this law is and what the impact has been on the state, families and children. Your government representatives need to understand the high cost to the tax payers of their state and other crucial facts. Have your fact sheet handy.
- **Public education**- the more people that understand your issue, the better. This is where using tabling at community events, postcard campaigns, op-ed letters, door knocking and other tactics can be used to get your message out.
- **Rally/Protest/Vigil**- all of these tactics can be used to push your agenda forward. Caution: these are time-consuming tactics and are often best used for specific situations. In Louisiana, we saved rallies for big events, such as the day our bill was going before the legislative committee, which was the first step of getting the bill passed. We also held a vigil, but the need for it came when a young man had been killed by an abusive guard. It is important to match the tactic with what you need at the time.

You can see that all of these tools are important, but equally important is how you use them and when. You can't hold a rally with 200 people when you haven't taken the time to do relationship building with other parents who can work beside you to get an action like a rally planned and executed. You also can't expect to accomplish a goal of changing a law without doing face-to-face visits with as many legislators as possible or having a strong influential group of allies. Think of a campaign as a wave building: the larger and stronger the wave, the lesser the chance it can be stopped. To help you in your endeavor of building a successful campaign read real of case studies done by FFLIC and JJPL on the "Close Tallulah Now" campaign at http://realcostofprisons.org/blog/archives/2004/10/the_death_of_ta.html and Connecticut's "Raise the Age" campaign at <http://www.raisetheagect.org/>.

5. What resources do we have to get this law changed?

Resources

- We have people who can talk to their legislators.
- We have families and children who can testify about their own experiences.
- We have someone who works in an office that can get our fact sheets printed.
- We have someone who knows how to make flyers.
- We have someone who has good writing skills and can write op-ed articles.
- We have a few folks who are great at doing fund raising.
- We have 5 people in this room who can give \$\$\$ each month to help with postage.
- We have someone who knows a judge who doesn't like this law because it takes away judiciary discretion.

Money is always hard to come by, but don't get bogged down worrying about it. There are plenty of actions that can be taken with little to no money. You will want to look at the strengths of all of your members to see who might have fundraising talents. Are a few of you great cooks? Hold a spaghetti dinner using items donated by others; sell the dinners to use for trips to the legislature. There are so many ways to get the help you need, be creative and resourceful and you will find this isn't the hardest part of a campaign.

6. What next steps (actions) need to be taken?

Next steps/Actions

- We need a legislative packet (*see below for materials to include).
- We need a way to get the information to our legislators (are we calling, going for office visits, sending letters, etc...).
- We need a plan for how often we meet to receive updates (do we do this by calls, emails or meetings).
- We need to talk with judges and others to find their views on this law.
- We need to organize more families.



Other good items to include on this chart are “By Whom” and “By When.” Concrete deadlines serve the purpose of keeping your campaign moving and moving orderly.

***Legislative Packet**

1. General information sheet (who are you and why you care about this issues, name, contact information)
2. Fact sheet on transfer issues
3. Any articles that have been circulated in local newspapers
4. Frequently Asked Questions
5. Proposed legislation
6. Model legislation and outcomes
7. Research/summary sheets on research

Don't give legislators too much to read. Most don't take the time to get past the first sheet. Keep that in mind and make the first page the most compelling! Hopefully, your readers will be drawn into your case and keep reading. I have sent letters and made phone calls, but by far the best response you get is from a face-to-face meeting. The most persuasive arguments are made face-to-face with legislators. Call ahead and ask to see your legislator when he/she is in town, before the session starts, rather than during session when people are on tight deadlines and hurried schedules. Then when your bill comes before the legislature later in the session you can do a brief call or meeting to remind them of their commitment.

The Campaign for Youth Justice website has tools and guides that can be helpful to you if you are ready to think about legislation. Read through these materials and think through the work that will be required to be successful. It can better to wait than to bring a bill that doesn't make good sense for all involved. This may just make it harder when a good bill comes along. Successful movements take time and thoughtful planning. Don't rush! Ask questions! Get help! We are here for you.

A few Thoughts, from one Family Member to Another

As the parent of a son incarcerated in one of the worst juvenile prisons in this country and tried and sentenced as adult, I offer you a personal perspective.

It can be intimidating to walk into a room full of professionals who know each other and support each other. It may even be the case that you are looked at as the “bad parent”. Keep in mind that no one knows your child better than you and, therefore, you have a unique perspective on transfer laws that few others have. You may not be there to advocate on behalf of your child, but you have learned things about transfer that most of these people will never learn. You have witnessed personally the devastation and serious consequences of having your child tried and convicted as an adult. These lessons can’t be overstated. You are the expert on how families and children are hurt by transfer laws! Your role here is very important, despite doubts others may have.



For too long, the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems have operated on myth, media hype, corruption and bad practice. The result is an ineffective, harmful and money draining system that doesn’t provide the public safety it promises, nor serves our youth or their communities. In today’s tough economic times, it is important that we spread this message. The US can’t imprison its way out of the social problems we face. We must turn away from the prison building spree this nation has embraced for the last 3 decades and stop spending our tax dollars on bricks and mortar. Research tells us this is a fruitless endeavor that causes harm, rather than provide the help we need. It is an incredibly expensive endeavor with many people profiting on the backs of poor and/or children of color. Yet, it ultimately is a failed experiment in solving the public safety challenges that continue to plague us.

I mention all of these things so you can understand that, despite the fact the people at the tables appear to be the experts, this system has failed so miserably and at such high financial and human costs, that it is painfully obvious there are really few experts on these issues. We should all be of the mindset that we are in trouble and it will take everyone to solve these decades-old dilemmas.

That being said, “attitude” has no place in this struggle. As parents we should be indignant and we should fight against the status quo at every opportunity BUT we must do it with data, our personal stories and with best practice alternatives. We can’t sustain a movement with anger or hostility. This is not to say that you will not feel anger, hurt or frustration but you must use your strategies and good information to win the fight.



If you are too hostile, people will simply stop listening. If the system becomes too defensive, the process of change will not happen. There may be times when your anger and hurt have a place, but consider this carefully over the long term if you desire to win change.

In my experience, there have been times when my outrage was completely appropriate. In Louisiana, we had a Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission (JJIC). This commission's responsibility included overseeing and implementing the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003. This was legislation that we, as families, worked hard for and if implemented properly, we would have seen change faster and with less harm to children.

In 2008, five years later, there was still too much talk and not enough action on the part of the state to implement change. Each time we went to these JJIC meetings, we would plan for weeks and map out our strategies, give our all, but still no action. A week before the last one of these meetings I would attend before leaving Louisiana, I went back to one of the prisons where my son had been incarcerated 7 years before. I saw children with "dead eyes", a term I used to use to describe my own son's eyes. He was lost, neglected, abused and powerless. Imprisonment takes away their spirit, the light in their eyes of hope and a belief in anything good in this world. I smelled the same filth in that place that I smelled on my own son seven years earlier. I saw the bruises, the limps, the broken teeth, the fear, I saw it all again.

A week later, I listened as yet another state youth corrections director tried to explain away what was happening inside that prison, just as his predecessors had before him. Then, I saw the same Commissioners nodding in agreement that they knew this was a hard job and, of course, he needed time to change things. When my name was called to take the floor, my well thought out notes fell to my side and my anger and indignation at these people took front and center stage.

Instead of the fact giving and pleading I usually did, I asked every family member of those incarcerated or formerly incarcerated to stand up. You could have heard a pin drop, in this crowded legislative hearing room, as one by one over half the room stood up.

My message was simple.

"I have listened to the same rhetoric for 5 years. Last week at Jetson (the juvenile prison) I saw children whose hopes have long since died while you listen to this rhetoric meeting after meeting. While you try to figure out your schedules and work to not offend anyone, it is these people and their children who suffer. While you give this man time to do his job, *Mrs. Jones buried her son last week after he died in your facility, three weeks away from being released. What are you going to say to her today? The time for talk has ended, we need to stop talking about change and do it."

This hearing was covered by media and news of the meeting went out all over the state. It takes a lot of work to make a hearing like that count for something. See box below for more details. The assets we had from networking and coalition building can't be over stated, they were both critical to a successful campaign.

Detail, detail, details...

- ✓ We made sure to have every media outlet possible at the hearing
- ✓ We made sure parents and families were there
- ✓ We showed our solidarity and unity, by wearing red t-shirts
- ✓ We did our research and knew what was happening inside the facilities
- ✓ We visited the facility and took senators and representatives with us (including ones that sit on that commission)
- ✓ We provided solutions to the issues the facilities still faced
- ✓ We made calls to every influential person we knew beforehand
- ✓ We made calls and sent letters to the Governor
- ✓ We helped connect the media to families willing and able to talk about their experiences
- ✓ We sent out a letter to our old allies and asked them to join us and made calls to people who had fought by our side before

If you are interested in learning more about networking or coalition building, please call us at the Campaign for Youth Justice. We have years of experience and would like to help. If you would like help in building your rap, talk with us and we will help you create your own message that you feel comfortable with. For more information on our state and national partners in your area, check out our website or give us a call.



Suggested Reading List

Latest Findings from the CDC

Fact Sheet - Prosecuting Youths as Adults Creates Younger Repeat Offenders

Published by the Department of Mental Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

“Jailing Juveniles: Youth in Adult Jails”

Fact Sheet - The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America

Published by the Campaign for Youth Justice

Fact Sheet Collateral Consequences

Fact Sheet How the US Measures Up

Fact Sheet Reverse Waiver

Fact Sheet Trying Youth as Adults

Fact Sheet Youth in Adult Prisons

“Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America

A November 2007 report from the Campaign for Youth Justice, “Jailing Juveniles: The Dangers of Incarcerating Youth in Adult Jails in America,” provides a summary of the risks that youth face when incarcerated in adult jails and a review of the limited federal and state laws protecting them.

“The Consequences Aren’t Minor: The Impact of Trying Youth as Adults and Strategies for Reform”

This March 2007 study examines the laws and data in seven key states: California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, Virginia and Wisconsin

“No Turning Back: Promising Approaches to Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities Affecting Youth of Color in the Justice System”

This report produced by Building Blocks for Youth in 2005 chronicles successful campaigns and can be helpful to see what strategies have been tried and found successful.

All of the above materials and more can be found online at
<http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/facts-a-research.html>

Fact Sheet: Trying Youth as Adults

What does it mean to “try youth as adults”?

Since 1899, when a separate court for young people was created in Chicago, young people who broke the law were brought before the juvenile court. In rare cases, judges decided which youth were “not amenable to treatment” in the juvenile court. In these rare cases, the jurisdiction of the juvenile court was “waived” and the youth were sent or “transferred” to the adult criminal court. In more recent years, states have passed a number of laws to expand the mechanisms in which youth may be prosecuted in adult court.

How are youth “tried” as adults?

There are five major ways that youth can be prosecuted in adult court:

Judicial Waiver

45 states allow juvenile court judges the discretion to have a youth’s case tried in the adult criminal court.

Direct File or “Prosecutorial Discretion”

15 states allow prosecutors the discretion to have a youth’s case tried in the adult criminal court.

Mandatory Waiver

15 states require juvenile court judges to automatically transfer a youth’s case to adult criminal court for certain offenses or because of the age or prior record of the offender.

Statutory Exclusion

29 states automatically require a youth’s case to be tried in the adult court based on the age of the youth or the alleged crime or both.

Age of Majority Statutes

Two states—New York, and North Carolina—automatically prosecute 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. Ten states—Connecticut, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin—automatically prosecute 17-year-olds as adults.



How many youth are tried as adults?

Despite the fact that many of these state laws were intended to prosecute the most serious offenders, most children who are tried in adult courts are there no matter how minor their offense. Estimates range on the number of youth prosecuted in adult court nationally. Some researchers believe that as many as 200,000 children are prosecuted every year.

How does “trying youth as adults” affect youth?

Youth tried in the adult criminal court:

- Face the same penalties as adults, including life without parole;
- Will receive little or no education, mental health treatment, or rehabilitative programming;
- Will obtain an adult criminal record that may significantly limit their future education and employment opportunities;
- Are at greater risk of assault and death in adult jails and prisons with adult inmates; and
- Will be more likely to re-offend than youth not exposed to the negative influences and toxic culture of the adult criminal punishment system.

What is the impact on youth of color?

Youth of color are most negatively affected by policies to try youth as adults. For example, in the CFYJ reports, “Critical Condition” and “America’s Invisible Children” key findings reveal disturbing aspects in the transfer of youth, especially African-American and Latino, to the adult criminal court. The findings show over-representation and disparate treatment of youth of color and raise serious questions about the fairness and appropriateness of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal system.

Does trying youth as adults reduce crime and increase public safety?

Study after study has demonstrated that youth transferred to adult court are more likely to re-offend than those sent to the juvenile justice system for the same type of offense and with similar prior records. Of those youth who committed new crimes, those sent to adult court re-offended at approximately twice the rate of those sent to juvenile court.

