



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

## **2015 CFYJ Media Guide**

*Prepared by the Campaign for Youth Justice*

1220 L Street, NW, Suite 605  
Washington, D.C. 20005

**Dear Advocate:**

**Congratulations! You've decided to get involved with the Campaign for Youth Justice!**

**The Campaign for Youth Justice seeks to raise awareness about the impact of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal justice system. The Campaign for Youth Justice believes that youth deserve a second chance, and should not be tried and incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system.**

**In taking action, you will be joined by many other people throughout the country in sharing your views on the impact of state policies of trying and sentencing children as adults and why the laws needs to be re-examined.**

**This guide contains:**

- **Basic info on the media**
- **Information on working with the media**
- **Sample materials**

**We hope you find this information helpful as we work together to make a difference in the lives of our nation's children.**

**Sincerely,**

**The Campaign for Youth Justice**

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# What Reporters Look For

From school shootings to murder cases, media coverage of juvenile crime tends to focus on the sensational. Blow-by-blow accounts of a few violent crimes fuel the perception that our nation's youth are "super-predators" and that the juvenile justice system is not equipped to deal with today's youth.

The way the media cover crime could make us toss up our hands and despair. But instead, we must engage the media at their own game. That is why the Campaign for Youth Justice works to generate media coverage that tells another story: how youth in the adult criminal justice system could be better served in the juvenile justice system, where they would be more likely to rehabilitate and receive a second chance to succeed in life.

The most important lesson we have learned is to work with the media. To do that effectively, we need to stop thinking like advocates, legal experts or researchers, and start thinking like the media. That means figuring out what editors look for when they decide whether to cover a story, and handing reporters the elements they need to write that story quickly.

What do reporters and editors look for when they decide what to cover?

- **Compelling human stories:** Personal stories, not broad analyses are the way most people begin to understand an issue. Reporters often want an individual story to hook an audience, so try to make one or two personal stories of youth who have turned their lives around and the impact of incarceration on a youth's life a centerpiece of your media work.
- **Unusual alliances:** The more unusual your alliances, the more likely you are to make news, so if you're going to hold a press conference, think about who else you could invite to join you.
- **Celebrity power:** The media love celebrities. If there is a celebrity in the area who might come out and support your effort at a public event, invite them to join you.
- **New facts and figures:** Reports that help us understand the world we live in are a staple of news coverage. Releasing new facts and figures can be a great tool for generating media. Check out the Campaign for Youth Justice's website for key facts and figures and suggestions on where to find help in your state.
- **The first, the biggest, the most original:** Reporters get press advisories about protests, rallies, and other events every single day. If you want yours to stand out, try to show reporters that your event is the first of its kind, has an unprecedented level of support and is bigger or more original than anything else going on in your community that day.

- **Compelling visuals:** Sometimes a picture tells a story better than words. A strong visual angle can get photographers and TV cameras to cover an event that would have otherwise not been assigned to a reporter. For example, hold a press conference outside of an adult jail, or on the steps of a courthouse.
- **Youth:** Adults are fascinated by what makes youth tick. Reporters often show interest in stories about young people making positive statements and taking action about the things they care about.
- **Local angles; national trends:** Reporters in the regional bureaus of national papers seek out local stories that illuminate national trends. Reporters at local papers love stories that compare their region to others. Highlighting how your juvenile justice programs can mesh with or buck a national trend, or how they compare with other jurisdictions can build the news value of your event.

## **Planning a Media Hit**

- **Set a Goal**

Why you are planning the media hit? Set a clear goal you are working toward, and always make sure you are working toward it.

- **Determine your target audience**

Usually, you will be targeting key decision makers. You will want to target specific news outlets that will reach those individuals. Take other factors into account when determining when/where/how you will do the media hit. Will you target local, community papers, or larger news agencies? Is your event in a highly populated enough area to receive adequate public attention? Is the legislature in session while you perform the hit? All of these questions must be considered.

- **Pick a good time, date and place**

If you want media to come to an event, plan it for the morning, from 10:00am to 12:00 noon on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday morning. That way reporters can interview your spokespersons, write their stories and file before deadline. You cannot predict earthquakes or fires, but you can check that the date you choose does not clash with a presidential visit or other big local event. Make sure the location you choose is appropriate, accessible, and will not take long for reporters to get to.

- **Decide what kind of media exposure you want**

There are so many different ways to increase media exposure: Press releases, pitching the story well, good spokespersons, radio newscasts, and press conferences can all increase media exposure of a particular issue. Make sure you prioritize your methods of exposure in such a way that you receive as much as possible.

- **Plan ahead**

At least ten weeks before your event is set to take place, write a media outreach plan that sets firm deadlines, and stick to them. That way, you will not be caught in crisis mode right before your event takes place. The sample timeline in this kit is designed to help you develop your plan.

- **Develop a clear message and stay on it**

Ask yourself: what is the one-sentence message that you want the public to take away when they open their newspaper and read about your event? Once you determine the message, stay on message. Make sure the message is hammered home in all your materials, in every interview you give and in the character of your media event itself.

- **Decide who to take your story to**

Look at the various sources of the media, including local and national papers, magazines, radio and TV so you know what kind of stories get what kind of coverage. Identify outlets and columnists who are sympathetic to youth, and reporters who have good written stories in the past. Build good lists of reporters you want to pitch.

- **Get your event listed**

The associated Press runs a daybook which tells local media what is going on in their area, and it is essential to get your event listed there the day before it happens (Check local phone listings for the local Associated Press office.) Most metropolitan regions also have a local wire service for the same purpose. Be sure to fax over your media advisory to all the local daybooks at least a couple days in advance and call to make sure your event gets listed.

- **Select and train your spokespersons**

There are several kinds of great spokespersons: researchers, experts and people who have compelling personal stories to tell. Ideally, you want several of each. They should be articulate, able to say what they need to in a few sentences, funny (if possible), outspoken and qualified. They should know the issue well, but most importantly, they should be prepared. Work with your spokespersons ahead of time, provide them with talking points, and practice with them to make sure they stay on the message.

- **Send clear press materials**

Hundreds of press releases and press packets arrive in newsrooms everyday and you need to make yours stand out. When you mail packets or fax your release, make sure your headlines are big, clear, and communicate why your event is the most newsworthy one in the region that day.

- **Make the reporter's job as easy as possible**

Most reporters are overworked and some have to file several stories in one day. Provide them with everything they need to write the story, including spokespersons with phone numbers, statistics, fact sheets, background articles, bios of spokespersons, etc. Fed-ex, email, or fax information right away. If they call you, drop everything and talk to them.

- **Follow-up phone calls**

Reporters do not mind if you call them back. In fact, some of them like it. Pitch the story on voice mail. Leave messages. Call back the next day if they do not call you. Be persistent. Remember, they need you as much as you need them.

- **Make sure spokespersons are available**

Reporters often want to interview spokespersons when following up on a pitch. Know where you can reach your spokespersons at all times, and on the day of the event, make sure they carry a cell-phone, and know to expect press calls.

- **Pitch a follow-up story**

Actions and rallies are important, but usually disappear after one day. Try to set up constant hits (e.g. Monday is a press release, Tuesday is a public rally, Wednesday a celebrity gives an exclusive story to the local paper, Thursday is an Op-Ed piece, and the weekend is an editorial). That way you'll have a bigger, longer-lasting impact.

## Pitching Stories to the Media

When most people think of public relations, they think of writing press releases, op-eds and letters. Those are important skills, but one thing that's critical to an effective public relations campaign is pitching your story to reporters.

In a busy newsroom, your press release might fly out of the fax machine or mail, get buried under a stack of paper and never reach the right reporter, and even if it does that is no guarantee that he/she will actually look at it. Unless you call to follow up, you will never know. That means you probably will not take the story to another reporter who might be looking for a story like yours.

Pitching helps us figure out all those things, and learn which angles excite the reporters. One reporter might love facts and figures, while another needs human interest to get them going. Some outlets need super-local angles, while others want hooks to pending legislation. Calling reporters, columnists, editors and producers helps you learn what individual reporters want and need, and helps you build the personal relationships key to placing stories.

Here are some pointers for how to go about pitching a story:

- **Rehearse your pitch with friends or colleagues before you start.** Writing it down is not enough. You do not want it to sound too scripted.
- **Think before you pitch.** Is there a specific angle this reporter might be interested in? If so, incorporate it into your call.
- **Pitch in the morning when reporters are at their desks and hungry for news.** By 1:00 pm they are out on stories, and by 5:00 pm they are on deadline.
- **If you get a reporter on the phone, introduce yourself and ask if they have a minute to talk.** If they say no, ask when a good time to call them back is. If they say yes, give them your pitch.
- **When you get a reporter's attention, cut to the chase.** Don't bother asking if they received your fax. Tell them what you are calling about and get into the pitch right away.
- **Engage the reporter in conversation.** Throw out some questions. "Are you still following the state's juvenile justice programs?" "Have you heard the Governor is talking about sending youths to adult court?" Listen to feedback and ask the reporter directly if they are interested in your story. If they say yes, set up an interview time right away. If they say no, ask why.
- **If the reporter you have targeted is too busy to do your story, ask who else you should take it to.** If they think it is a good story, they will give you a name or two. If they do not think it is a good story, find out why. If one reporter turns you down, do not

be put off. Go back to the assignment desk and see if there is another reporter who might cover it.

- **If you get a voice-mail, leave a message.** Make sure to leave your number slowly and clearly. Make regular follow-up calls until you get the reporter on the phone. If you cannot get them in person, leave a second message a couple of days later. Do not leave more than two messages on voice-mail.

- **Keep detailed notes of who you called and what they said and use your notes when you follow up.** When you call several reporters in a day it is surprisingly easy to forget who you spoke to.

- **When you get a reporter interested, seal the deal.** Schedule and interview and then confirm their participation at your event.

- **Do not forget to follow up.** Check with reporters who have expressed interest right before your event takes place. A reporter who says they are interested might be put on another story at the last minute, leaving you to pitch your story to the assignment desk all over again. Or, a reporter may simply forget your event if they are not called and reminded.

- **Always say “thank you.”** Reporters receive pitch calls all the time, but it is surprising how few people thank a reporter who did a good job. A quick call to say thank you is good manners, and it will make a reporter more willing to take your call next time.

- **Smile when you pitch.** If you sound bored when you pitch, the reporter will switch off. Communicate your enthusiasm and passion for the story when you pitch.

## **Making Video News Releases (VNRs)**

A VNR is when a video or recording is produced and distributed to outlets in the television and radio.

VNRs can be a relatively inexpensive way to get a message out. In the US, a good VNR can run on 40 or 50 stations and reach up to 3 million viewers, at a cost of about \$20,000.

Timeliness, local content, sharp sound bytes, and strong writing are all important for VNRs.

Packages usually contain a 90-second piece, additional sound bytes, and a bit of raw footage. Footage must be professionally shot and should, ideally, include images that would be difficult for the media to get by themselves.

Conversely, to save money one might choose to focus on radio, rather than television, saving a substantial amount of effort and money needed for an effective visual.

Think ahead. If you know something is coming up far enough in advance, you can start putting the VNR together early, filling in the last few blanks just before the event itself. Plus, you can reuse much of the footage in later VNRs.

## **Marketing Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**

PSAs can be a good way to get an important message to your community about your message.

**Get copies of the PSAs and show them to your colleagues.**

**Encourage your local media outlets to air the PSAs**

**Call the public service directors of your local TV and radio station, and ask if they will air the PSAs.**

**Provide the TV stations with a Beta format video and the radio stations with a CE for them to screen and then air. Many stations will put them on a three-month rotation.**

**Call the advertising managers at your local newspapers, and request a meeting. Bring fact sheets or information about relevant local programs to the meeting.**

**Get the printed PSA into the newsletters and magazines or organizations reaching and supporting America's youth.**

Whenever you find a public service director or advertising manager interested in the PSAs, be patient and persistent in communicating with them. Remember, you are the person who is the most motivated to make sure the PSAs are used.

# Writing Media Materials

*This guide will help to produce effective media materials to help achieve the intended result. Feel free to refer to these descriptions and the examples at the end of the packet as you compile your own.*

## 1. Media Advisory

A media advisory is quick, clear, and no more than a page. It is designed to draw reporters to an event or give them a heads-up about an upcoming news story. A media advisory is ideal, for example, when you want to let reporters know about a rally or press conference, or if you want to spark interest in a new report or a big news story without giving away the details before you are ready. Make sure to send the media advisory out several days in advance, and make sure that all dates of embargo are clear when releasing it to a known reporter in advance.

A media advisory usually includes:

- “Media advisory” and the date.
- Name and number of key contacts.
- Dateline (which city and state the news is being released from).
- Arresting headline.
- Five Ws (who, what, where, when, and why).
- One or two explanatory paragraphs.
- ### or -30- to indicate the end of the advisory.

## 2. Press Release

While media advisories give the bare-bones information, a press release tells the reporters what the story is. It is a short version of the dream story you would like to see appear in print. Because it is written like a news story, the bulk of the text should sound objective, with all facts, figures, and statements of opinion carefully attributed.

Press releases expand out in the “inverted pyramid” style, with the first paragraph giving the big picture, and each paragraph that follows providing more details. Send out the day of your event. Have copies available at the event and posted on your website. Make sure that someone is at the office answering the phones and has a copy of the press release along with all the cellular telephone numbers of anyone authorized to talk with the media. That way, the media can stay in touch. If this is not possible, leave a voice message with one or two contacts’ cellular telephone numbers for media calls.

Key elements to include:

- Contact names and numbers
- Date of release

- Headlines and sub-headlines that spell out what makes this news
- Dateline (what city and state the news is being released from)
- First paragraph that includes key details (what, when, where, why, and who)
- Pithy quote from your key spokesperson. This gives you a chance to articulate your message clearly and gives reporters a quote they can use.
- “Nut paragraph” that gives background information that is essential to the story (e.g. The minimum age to transfer juveniles to adult court was signed into law in (your state) on (date))
- Description of the organization that’s issuing the news (e.g. C4YJ is a group trying to keep youth out of the adult system nationally).
- Press releases should be one or two pages long. At the end of the page, write –more- if there is more, or #### or -30- to indicate the end.

### **3. Editorial Board Letter/Memo**

Editorials, which usually appear on the left-hand side of the op-ed page, are where the newspaper editors weigh in on pressing issues and are a powerful way to reach public and opinion leaders. To secure an editorial in your local newspaper, the first step is to send a letter or memo to the editor of the editorial board.

Editorial board letters are formal in tone. Start by introducing yourself and explain your campaign, you want the newspaper to editorialize in support of your campaign’s goals. Finish by proposing a meeting to discuss the issues you have raised and promise to call to follow up.

### **4. Opinion Editorial**

Getting an op-ed published in a local paper is a terrific way to communicate your message relating to a specific event. Also, they are used to bring attention to new data or legislation introduced. But it is not always easy to get your op-ed printed, so here are a few tips to help you along.

Most op-ed editors look for pieces that are 500 to 700 words, timely, relevant, original, and engaging. They look for local authors who have personal or professional expertise on the subject.

For your campaign, it is essential that you strategically target who your ‘messenger’ ought to be and what agents will be best. For example, you are targeting your county executive to stop allowing youth to be placed in adult jail. Who does the county executive listen to? Is he/she a member of a faith community? If so, see if you can get a pastor in that community to author the op-ed.

If you are writing an op-ed:

## **Do**

- Make one clear argument. Be provocative, be punchy, and write what you think.
- Make it relevant. Show why this issue is topical, and how it affects your region.
- Use personal anecdotes and real-life stories to bring your story to life.
- Include a few facts and figures to support your point
- Observe the requirements of the newspaper. Give the paper a call before you submit your piece to check how long the op-ed should be, who you should send it to and any other requirements they may have.

## **Don't**

- Beat around the bush with lengthy introductions.
- Sit on the fence. An op-ed is about opinion, so say what you think.
- Preach, rail, or make sweeping statements you cannot back up.
- Ramble. Read over your work to make sure it is concise and clear.
- Submit a piece with typos, grammatical errors, or no contact information.

## **5. Letter to the Editor**

Relate your letter to something recently discussed in the publication to which you are writing. Discuss the problem trying youth as adults and present solutions to the problem. If your letter is going to be shortened, it will usually be the final paragraphs, so don't save your point for the end. Get right into your point immediately

Write clearly and concisely following the limitations usually given on the editorial page or letters-to-the-editor page. Publications rarely edit and, instead, select well-written and grammatically correct letters. Make it easy to publish yours.

Sign your name and include your phone number and address if required.

Mail, fax or e-mail your letter to the address listed for the publication.

Keep in mind that most publications verify by phone or in writing that you, and not someone attributing these opinions to you, authored the letter.

## **6. Fact Sheets, FAQs, Case Studies and other background materials.**

Because reporters are so busy, minimize their work by giving them all the information they need. Offering well-researched, thorough and compelling materials makes it more likely that reporters will write the kind of story you want to see. Possible background materials include:

- Case Studies
- Local history
- Local facts and figures

## Sample timeline for a Media Hit

*In an ideal world, you will be able to plan your event several weeks in advance and cover every base, but that is not always possible. With hard work and a little luck, you can pull off a terrific press event in as little as a week's notice. If you do have the time to plan far ahead, this is a basic guideline of what you should be thinking about and when.*

### **10 weeks before the event**

- Plan and schedule the event or activity
- Write up your first media plan
- Develop your message

### **8 weeks before the event**

- Select spokespersons and firm up logistical arrangements
- Write media materials

### **6 weeks before the event**

- Develop talking points and train spokespersons
- Create lists of reporters to target
- Write and send your op-ed to the op-ed editor

### **4 weeks before the event**

- Finalize press releases, editorial board letters and other materials
- Send materials and make initial pitch calls to publications and columnists.

### **2 weeks before the event**

- Mail press packets to daily news reporters, producers and editors
- Make first round of follow up-calls
- Send editorial board letter requesting a meeting and follow up

### **1 week before the event**

- Continue making follow up calls and “digging” to find the right reporter
- Fax or fed-ex materials to reporters who request them
- Make sure all spokespersons are prepared for the event and have cell phones with them on the day.
- Make sure you have extra press packets to take to the event
- Send media advisories to local daybooks

### **The day before the event**

- Make another round of pitch calls
- Check in with spokespersons and do a run-through if possible
- Check to make sure your event is listed in local daybooks
- Fax or email your advisory or press release to all relevant outlets.

**Day of the event**

- First thing in the morning, call back any reporters who have expressed interest as well as all the local TV and radio outlets.
- Make sure you have a designated person to welcome media to the event. Ask all reporters to sign in and hand them press packets
- Return any calls from reporters immediately and make sure you and your spokespersons are contactable at all times.
- Ask reporters when their pieces will run and get good copies of all the stories you appear in

## Who's Who in the Media?

- **Assignment Editor / Metro Editor**

Newspaper, television, and radio newsrooms have assignment editors on duty all the time. That person is responsible for sifting through all the news coming into a newsroom and determining who covers which stories. If you are not sure which reporter to pitch, the assignment desk is the place to start. Some newspapers also have metro editors who deal with local news.

- **Planning Editor**

For stories with a longer lead, most television newsrooms have a planning editor who decides which stories to follow up on.

- **Bureau Chief / Correspondent**

National publications have reporters scattered around the country. Getting to know your local correspondents and bureau chiefs can help get your stories on the national news.

- **Wire Services**

Associated Press, Reuters, and other wire services are essential outlets to pitch because one story that goes out on the wire may show up in hundreds of papers around the country.

- **Daybook**

This is a service provided by AP and other wire services in most media markets. It lists the media events going on in the region each day.

- **General Assignment (GA) Reporter**

A 'floating' reporter in the newsroom who is assigned news stories on a daily basis by the assignment editor.

- **Beat Reporter**

A reporter who focuses on one issue, such as education, the environment, or crime. Beat reporters usually have some expertise in or specialist knowledge of the subject they cover.

- **Editorial Board**

The top editors of the paper who convene weekly to discuss which issues the newspaper should take a stance on, and what they should say. The editor with the most expertise on an issue is usually dispatched to write the editorial.

- **Op-ed Editor**

Hundreds of people submit non-solicited opinion editorials each week. The op-ed editor decides which ones will run, and works with the author to edit the piece.

- **Columnist**

Newspaper columnists give their take on current events. They are easily recognizable because their photograph usually accompanies their column. While some columnists seek strong human interest stories, others prefer hard political commentary.

- **Producer**

Television and radio shows all have producers (national TV and radio shows have hundreds) who research stories, decide on who to interview and do all the behind-the-scenes work to get a story on the air.

- **Photo Editor**

Wire services and newspapers all have photo editors. If you have a story with a compelling visual angle, it is sometimes worth pitching the photo editor directly.

## Ten Tips for Effective Interviews

### 1. Be prepared

Before the interview, set aside a few minutes to think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Ask a friend or colleague to fire questions at you, and rehearse your answers out loud.

### 2. Watch what you wear

Wear dark, plain colors; avoid stripes and busy patterns. When being interviewed on camera, a simple rule of thumb is to never wear white.

### 3. Use personal stories to bring the issue to life

Do not just tell reporters why you think a program is a success. Tell stories about specific youth who have turned their lives around. If you are discussing why certain aspects of the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems do not work, give concrete examples.

### 4. Provide a few facts and figures to support your point

While you don't want to overwhelm reporters with numbers, do try to have a couple of key facts and figures at your fingertips and use them to support your argument.

### 5. Reiterate your main point clearly

Make sure you articulate your main message clearly and do not be afraid to say it again and again. The more times you get your key point across, better people will remember it.

### 6. Do not get trapped into talking about things you do not know about

If you do not know the answer to a question, bring it back to something you do know. If they ask, for example, what you think about a new piece of federal legislation, you could say: *“Well, I don't know the specifics of that bill, but what I can tell you is that in my x years of experience with juvenile justice, what's most effective is...”*

### 7. Tailor what you say to your audience

Are you talking to a TV news reporter who wants a speedy sound bite, a legal reporter who knows the ins and the outs of the system, or a beat reporter who wants an in-depth story about one program? Is the audience local or national? Think about who you are talking to and tailor what you say accordingly.

### 8. Get to know the reporter

Reporters are human too, and how a story turns out is as much about the interviewer as the interviewee. Ask them what their story is focusing on and what they plan to ask you.

### 9. You do not have to answer reporters' questions directly

Decide in advance what it is that you want to communicate and steer the conversation back to that point, e.g., *“You know, I think the real question here is should we be investing more money prisons or should we focus on more effective juvenile justice programs?”*

### **10. Take your time**

Do not rush into answering a question you feel uncomfortable with. Remember: There is no such thing as “off the record.” Watch your words, and do not say anything that you do not want to see in a story. Speak slowly, ask for clarification if you need it, and prepare yourself with a couple of space fillers, e.g. *“That is a really important question, Jim, and it gets right to the heart of the issue”*

Above all relax, smile, and be yourself! Even though you are talking about serious issues, the more relaxed you look the more credible you will appear to the audience, and the more likely you are to be asked back. Smile, make eye contact, and above all have fun. If you are being interviewed on camera, make sure you look at the interviewer instead of the camera.

# **Sample Press Advisory**

For Immediate Release  
[Date]

Contact: [Name]  
[phone number]

## **Public Oversight Hearing on Youth Center Closure** ***Group says Mayor Must Speed up Reforms to Close Beleaguered Facility***

(City, State) – Justice 4 DC Youth! Coalition (JDCY) members and allies will be testifying at the upcoming hearing before the Committee on Human Services on the status of the closure of the local youth center.

**DATE:** [Date]

**TIME:** [Time]

**LOCATION:** [Location]

The JDCY coalition is calling on the Administration to make the juvenile justice system reform effort a top priority and speed up the pace of the current reform efforts to close the local youth center, in accordance with a new law requiring the facility closure. The plan calls for significantly downsizing the number of secure beds at the facility, creating small home-like facilities along the lines of the nationally recognized Missouri model, and establishing effective community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration.

The Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) plan, supported by the JDCY, would implement key recommendations of the youth center to be closed no later than March 17, 2009.

At recent hearings before the Human Services Committee, JDCY members testified about the need to close the facility. The hearings highlighted the fact that the proposed plans to build a baseball stadium in the District, a \$667 million project, may be in operation sooner than the closure of the facility, a \$34 million project, as reported at the hearings by the Office of Procurement. Council members and JDCY coalition members expressed concerns about the fact that the building of the baseball stadium was of a higher priority than the closure of a decrepit, inhumane institution which had been the subject of a lawsuit for two decades.

For additional information, contact the Justice 4 DC Youth! Coalition at: [phone number]

###

## **Sample Press Release for an event:**

## **Dr. Steven Berkowitz, Draft Statements for Press Conference**

As a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist much of my work has focused on the impact that psychosocial adversity and traumatic experiences have on development and pathways to poor functioning. Perhaps, no outcome is more problematic to individuals and society than that of delinquency and criminality. The economic, social and emotional burden of youth engaging in delinquent activities is beyond our capacities to fully measure and discern. But it up to us here to do our best to prevent youth who have engaged in delinquent activities from becoming adults who become hardened criminals that create additional burdens for all. I'm afraid that CT's current laws that place 16- and 17- year olds automatically in the Adult System actually increase the likelihood of youth becoming criminals rather than preventing it.

First of all, it's absolutely critical to recognize that adolescents are different than adults. In fact, there is a medical basis for teens' poor decision-making and acting out behaviors - the very things that have long frustrated parents about their teenagers. We all know that adolescence is a time a tremendous change, and it should not be a surprise that it is a time of tremendous growth and change in the brain. Between childhood and adulthood, the brain's wiring or neural networks becomes significantly more complex and more efficient. This is especially true in the brain's frontal and pre-frontal cortex, the key place in the brain that governs decision-making, consideration of alternatives, planning, setting long-range goals, and organization of sequential behavior. In fact, there is some research that demonstrates that the pre-frontal cortex is not fully formed and "on-line" until into the early 20's.

This natural process of cognitive development is then combined with psychosocial influences. During situations of emotional arousal and social pressure, the impulsive, short-sighted judgment of youth increases their likelihood of making poor choices and engaging in delinquent behaviors. The bottom line is that 16 and 17 year olds have a limited capacity for calculated judgment and independent decision making in these types of situations.

So, normal adolescent development is a risky time regardless, they have the physical capacity to do most things, but their brains are far behind their bodies. But most studies demonstrate an additional burden for teenagers that find themselves in the Juvenile justice system. From very early ages, risk factors, such as child maltreatment, violence and trauma have significant impacts on youths' development and, in turn, play a causal role in future delinquency if not properly addressed early on.

Martin Teicher, one of the leading researchers in brain development stated:

**“Our brains are sculpted by our early experiences. Maltreatment is a chisel that shapes a brain to contend with strife, but at the cost of deep, enduring wounds.”**

It has been demonstrated time and time again that maltreated and abused children's brains are greatly impaired by these traumatic experiences and that one of the primary areas of the brain affected is the very pre-frontal cortex that is so essential in moderating impulses and behavior.

Whether abused or not, adolescent brains are not yet mature and are subject to innumerable internal and external influences. We are all aware of the profound impact that peers, the media and other influences have on teenagers' beliefs, ideas and behavior. We know that they learn how to behave from birth on from their environment. This occurs because the brain is the interface between the outside world and the individual and the brain actually changes in its biochemistry and structure in response to external events. An analogy may be helpful, if you think of building construction—think of the framing as our genes and experiences as the boards, insulation and façade. Clearly both are essential to a safe structure. While this happens to some extent throughout a person's life, it is most salient the younger the individual is. Younger children's brains are designed to grow and change in response to the environment and teenagers' brains, while less plastic also change in response to environmental stimuli more so than do adults.

This is extremely important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, adolescent brains and thus their behavior can change and improve or change and decline in response to their environments. And as Martin Teicher states, many of the adolescents in the juvenile justice system have wounds that are in need of healing. For most teenagers and especially those with delinquent behavior, close supervision, support, training and positive role models are likely to have a more profound and positive effect on youth than adults and the opposite is also true. Lack of supervision, support and intervention and affiliation with negative role models and peers will have a more profound negative effect. Operationally speaking I've just made drawn the distinction between the Juvenile and Criminal Justice System. The Juvenile system was created and continues to be more based in the Rehabilitation Model, while as we all know the Criminal Justice system is based on punishment and retribution. Knowing what we know about teenagers, we must ask how we would want our 16 and 17 year old sons and daughters to be treated-- with hope or resignation. Do we want to attempt to treat and rehabilitate or put them in an environment that increases the trajectory to criminal and antisocial activity? We've recognized the differences between youth and adults in our statutes concerning driving licenses and legal ages for drinking, but somehow we've ignored it when it comes to issues of justice. Raising the age of the juvenile offender is not only morally right, it is also scientifically right and right for children and our state.

# **Sample Editorial Board Letter**

[Date]  
[Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We are pleased to share with you the results of a public opinion poll that our groups released today on voter attitudes about our state's juvenile justice policy and I would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience. The poll was conducted by Zogby National, an independent national research firm.

The results show that the public overwhelmingly supports investing in rehabilitation and treatment rather than locking youth up in adult jails and prisons. Some of the key findings of the enclosed report are the following:

- 72% of respondents believe putting youth in adult correctional facilities makes them more likely to commit future crimes
- 68% of respondents believe persons under age 18 should not be incarcerated in jails and prisons that hold adults
- 95% of respondents believe increasing education and job skills training for youth in the juvenile system will help reduce crime.

Every year as many as 200,000 youth under 18 are prosecuted in adult criminal courts across the United States. Despite overwhelming research demonstrating that these policies have failed, statutes that prosecute youth in the adult criminal justice system remain on the books.

We encourage you to review the enclosed materials.

Sincerely,

[Your name, phone number, and address]

# **Sample Opinion Editorial**

TONI N. HARP and TONI E. WALKER

January 19, 2007

This session the General Assembly will consider legislation to end a shameful distinction. Connecticut locks up more children in adult prisons than any other state in the nation. We are one of only three states to punish all 16- and 17-year-olds - even those accused of the most minor and nonviolent of offenses - as adults.

Voluminous research shows that keeping nonviolent children in the juvenile system prevents recidivism. So we endanger the public safety by encouraging future crime while harming the economy by setting up children to spend a lifetime in the system. It is a cruel and senseless practice that legislators on both sides of the aisle agree we must end. The challenge is to write a bill that will appeal to a broad base not just in theory but in practice, to come up with a plan that our colleagues feel worthy of their support even in a session when we face critical issues such as health care access and skyrocketing energy costs.

There's an old saying: Laws are like sausages. People who love them should not watch them being made. We don't know about sausages. But, as co-chairwomen of the legislature's Juvenile Jurisdiction Planning and Implementation Committee, we have been glad to involve the public with experts and officials in a series of meetings on juvenile offenders that began in August. These sessions - 11 have been held with two more scheduled Jan. 25 and Feb. 8 at 1:30 p.m. at the Legislative Office Building - were broadcast on television and open in person to any citizen who wanted to help us make our way through mountains of reports and hours of testimony.

Our charge was to spend the months when the legislature was out of session thoroughly studying the implications of returning all but the most serious young offenders to the juvenile system. We were glad to have all manner of people at the table with us: police chiefs, children's advocates, lawyers, judges and our colleagues from the departments of Children and Families and of Corrections. Their presence is enabling us to come up with a plan that makes sense, not just from the perspective of lobbyists or politicians, but for the people on the ground, who will have to make our proposals work day in and day out.

While the stories of young lives derailed by our current system are dramatic, even heart-wrenching, we confess that much of our committee's work was rather dry. And that is good. It is good that we did thorough cost-benefit analyses, service audits and examinations of research on recidivism. It is good that we listened to the same issues discussed by so many stakeholders with different perspectives.

Slogans are a poor basis for government. It is the measured and inclusive consideration of ramifications that yields good public policy. Three decades ago, Connecticut lowered the age of adult jurisdiction to 16 in response to a sensationalized crime in New York. It

undoubtedly made for some catchy get-tough-on-crime speeches, but this hasty and ill-considered law has made no one any safer. Furthermore, it has ruined young lives and cost the state dearly in their lost economic potential. It was legislation done the wrong way, for the wrong reasons.

Each year, 10,000 Connecticut children can be expected to go through the adult judicial system. About two of them will have killed someone. We believe it is better to design a system for the 10,000 than for two. There will still be provision to move violent youths to the adult system - we are not talking about giving anyone a pass for serious crimes. The vast majority of minors, however, could be better held accountable in the juvenile system, where rehabilitative services have been proven to put kids back on track, rather than in the adult system, an ideal environment to create career criminals. The experience of other states proves this.

In this session, expect to see legislation to raise the age of adult jurisdiction to 18. Like many of the bills the legislature considers, the greatest impact will be on a particular group, the young people who now lose their childhood in adult prisons. But it will also make every citizen of this state safer and save tax dollars over time. It will be legislation done the right way, for the right reasons.

Toni N. Harp is a Democratic state senator from New Haven and Toni E. Walker is a Democratic state representative from New Haven.  
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## **Sample Letter to the Editor**

## Letters: Crime and punishment, etc.

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*Published 12:00 am PST Monday, January 29, 2007*

### **No-brainer prison reform**

Re "Ruling upends sentencing law," Jan. 23: The last days have brought invigorating discussion about ways to reform California's penal code and reduce the flow of people into prison. The governor, legislative leaders and now the U.S. Supreme Court all recognize the need for sentencing reform in California, but leaders will miss the big picture if they only focus on adult sentences. In 2000, California increased the number of crimes for which youths as young as 14 could be tried as adults and face adult penalties. Teenagers sent to adult court lose the opportunity for rehabilitation in the juvenile system, and California loses the opportunity to turn young lives around. Numerous studies have found that juveniles transferred to the adult system have a higher rate of recidivism than those kept in juvenile court. Are we surprised that children who don't get rehabilitative services stay on a prison path? They go on to commit more crimes. Changes in California's penal code should follow research and common sense. If California wants to reduce the number of people in prison, it should reduce the number of youth tried as adults and instead offer them rehabilitation in the juvenile system created for that purpose.

-- Elizabeth Calvin, Los Angeles

California Advocate, Children's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch

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## **Samples of Personal Stories**

**Anthony L.:** Anthony was a mentally disabled and hearing impaired child of 15 attending West Palm Beach junior high school, Florida. During school hours he reached into a classmate's pocket and stole two dollars in lunch money. Unfortunately for Anthony, his school had recently begun a "zero tolerance" policy on crime. He was soon charged in adult court for strong-arm robbery, extortion and petty theft, facing the possibility of 30 years to life sentence. The prosecutor only dropped the case after a 60 minutes crew arrived in town to investigate the situation.

**Anthony:** Early in his life, Anthony's parents and teachers recognized something different about him. Diagnosed with a mental health problem, Anthony was bounced between a total of eight schools, none of them able to treat his condition. At age 12, Anthony stole a car, but successfully completed his probation. At age 17, he was charged with grand theft auto and fleeing the scene of an accident with injuries. He was Direct Filed and charged as an adult. He is currently awaiting placement in a Moderate Risk residential facility for a period of 6-9 months, and after that he faces a Conditional Release for two to four months. He must put his life on hold while waiting for his placement. He is in a state of limbo, unable to get a job and unable to start his sentence.

**Dominique:** Dominique, an 18 year old girl from Princeton, Florida, is the oldest of four siblings. Her mother dead and her father in prison, she was shuffled between the homes of various family members. At age 16 she committed armed robbery, and was Direct Filed into the adult criminal justice system. She was sentenced to only two months in jail and one year of probation, but according to her those two months were a harsh punishment. Because the youths were separated from the adults, Dominique saw only three other girls during her sentence. When the four youths had recreation, the rest of the facility had to be locked down, so the guards rarely gave them their recreation time.. Now that she is on probation, Dominique attends Miami Dade Community college, and plans to go to a university to study Forensic Psychology.

**Jeff W.:** Jeff was a normal 17 year old kid who made one mistake that would haunt him for the rest of his life. In an attempt to impress a girl he liked, he purchased her marijuana on three separate occasions, and she paid him back for it. He did not profit from the deal, and it was more a friendly exchange than a sale. When she revealed she was an undercover police officer, Jeff found himself being tried as an adult for a felony. Taking pity on him, the judge allowed Jeff to get away with a reduced sentence. Still, the felony conviction prevented Jeff from receiving financial aid for college, and prevented him from joining the Air Force, as he had planned. He currently works full time while attending community college in order to one day own his own IT business.

**James O.:** James was a promising high school student who had hoped his basketball abilities could secure him a college scholarship. Unfortunately, at 17 he was caught selling marijuana to an undercover officer posing as a student. All of the recruiters who had promised him scholarships backed out, and he was facing a future without college. After his pleads for a second chance, Oklahoma State investigated James's basketball

abilities and his character. They found that he was truly remorseful for his actions, and had learned from his mistakes. He was accepted into Oklahoma State and in November of 2004 played his first game with them.

## **Sample Talking points**

## Talking Points

It is time to re-examine state laws on trying youth as adults. Here are some reasons why:

### **- Youth in adult prisons are not treated humanely and are not safe**

Justice Department research shows that youth incarcerated as adults are 8 times more likely to commit suicide than youth placed in juvenile facilities.

### **- Youth do not receive rehabilitation or treatment**

Youth sent to the adult criminal justice system are often not afforded the same kinds of services such as therapy, diversion or alternatives to incarceration that are available to young people in the juvenile justice system, no matter how minor their crime. Many of these youth have significant mental health and other needs that are not adequately addressed by the adult system.

### **- This practice doesn't promote public safety or reduce crime**

There is no evidence that the practice of sending youth to adult court works. In fact, there is significant evidence that shows these kinds of laws have the *opposite* effect: trying youth in adult court increases crime. Youth in the adult court are more likely to re-offend, and re-offend more seriously, when they are tried and incarcerated in the adult justice system.

### **-Adolescents are not adults, making reasoned, adult decisions**

In the Fall of 2006, the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice released the results of ten years of study in an issue brief titled, "Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence." The conclusion drawn in that study is this, "The scientific arguments do not say that adolescents cannot distinguish right from wrong nor that they should be exempt from punishment. Rather, they point to the need to consider the developmental stage of adolescence as a mitigating factor when juveniles are facing criminal prosecution. The same factors that make youths ineligible to vote or to serve on a jury require us to treat them differently from adults when they commit crimes."

### **-The overwhelming majority of children that enter the adult court aren't there for serious, violent crimes**

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 as many as 200,000 children are prosecuted every year.

### **- Polls of likely voters show that the general public does not support incarceration of youth as adults.**

9 out of 10 people polled believe that rehabilitation and treatment for incarcerated youth can help prevent future crime, and 8 out of 10 thought spending money on

rehabilitative services and treatment for youth will save money in the long run. 7 out of 10 of those polled felt that putting young people (under age 18) in an adult correctional facility will make them more likely to commit future crime. More than two-thirds (68 percent) disagreed that incarcerating youth in adult facilities “teaches them a lesson and deters them from committing future crimes.” By more than a 15 to 1 margin (92 percent to 6 percent), those polled believe that the decision to transfer youth to adult court should be made on a case-by-case basis.

# Sample Fact Sheet

## 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?<sup>1</sup>

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:

Three states automatically prosecute 16 and 17 year olds as adults – Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina. Ten state automatically prosecute 17 year olds as adults – Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

### 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 as many as 200,000 children are prosecuted every year.

### **How does "trying youth as adults" impact 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 which 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;
- 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 Building Blocks for Youth report, *Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served?*<sup>3</sup> key findings reveal disturbing aspects in the transfer of youth, especially youth of color, to the adult criminal court. The findings show overrepresentation 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 around twice the rate of those sent to juvenile court.

*Re-Arrest Rates Among Youth Sentenced in Adult Court*, a 2001 analysis in Florida found that, even after controlling for race, initial charge, and age, youth receiving adult sanctions were 4.90 times more likely to re-offend, including technical violations, and 2.26 times more likely to re-offend, excluding technical violations (meaning that a new case was brought against the youth).<sup>4</sup>

A 2002 study, *Juvenile Transfer to Criminal Court Study: Final Report*, also found that youth receiving juvenile sanctions had lower recidivism rates than youth receiving adult sanctions. While

comparing 315 “best-matched” pairs, they found that “49% of the youth transferred to adult court recidivated, compared with 37% of those who remained in the juvenile system.”<sup>5</sup>

Another study by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, published in 2006, also found lower recidivism rates while comparing youth in the juvenile justice system in New Jersey to youth transferred to the adult system in New York. “By using the two groups from the same metropolitan area, with similar economic opportunity, access to weapons, drug use, gang influences, and other influences on crime, any differences in rearrest between the two groups can be assumed to be due to the different court systems. The re-arrest rates were calculated after controlling for time on the street.” The results found that youth prosecuted in the adult courts in New York were 1.85 times more likely to be re-arrested for violent crimes than those prosecuted in the New Jersey juvenile courts, and 1.44 times more likely to be re-arrested for felony property crimes.<sup>6</sup>

Trying youth as adults does not reduce crime or increase public safety. In fact, youth tried as adults re-offend more than their counterparts in the juvenile justice system.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa. 2006. Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

<sup>2</sup> "Upper Age of Jurisdiction." Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 21 Nov. 2006 <<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/ezaco/html/upage.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Juskiewicz, J. 2000. Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served? Washington, DC: Prepared by Pretrial Services Resource Center for the Building Blocks for Youth Initiative.

<sup>4</sup> Miami-Dade County Public Defender's Office. Re-Arrest Rates Among Youth Sentenced in Adult Courts: Evaluation Report for Juvenile Sentencing Advocacy Project. 15 Oct. 2001. 12 Oct. 2006 <[http://www.pdmiami.com/JSAP\\_2001\\_Impact\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.pdmiami.com/JSAP_2001_Impact_Evaluation.pdf)>.

<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. A DJJ Success Story: Trends In Transfer of Juveniles to Adult Criminal Court. 08 Jan. 2002. 05 Oct. 2006. pg. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Issue Brief 5: the Changing Borders of the Juvenile Justice: Transfer of Adolescents to the Adult Criminal Court. 2006. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. 21 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7BB0386CE3-8B29-4162-8098-E466FB856794%7D/ADJJTRANSFER.PDF>>.

*Thank you for your interest in aiding the Campaign for Youth Justice. By working together with the media, we can educate people about the realities of sentencing our nation's youth as adults. Once that has been accomplished we will finally start to see a reformation of these inhumane laws.*