



November 16, 2017

Chairman Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: The National Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Coalition Supports S. 1917, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017

Dear Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

The National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition is pleased to see inclusion of critical issues pertaining to youth in the federal system as part of S. 1917, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017. The National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (NJJDPCC) is a collaborative array of more than two hundred national and state youth- and family- serving, social justice, law enforcement, corrections, and faith-based organizations, working to ensure healthy families, build strong communities and improve public safety by promoting fair and effective policies, practices and programs for youth involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Reports and hearings over the past several years have shed a national spotlight on the problems of solitary confinement and the particular harms isolation imposes upon young people. This bill takes important action to eliminate the dangerous practice of solitary confinement for youth. It is well known that when youth are placed in facilities designed for adults, they are more likely to be put in segregation. And in both juvenile and adult facilities, extended lockdown alone in a cell or unnecessary use of restraints such as shackles, can traumatize youth, exacerbate existing mental illness, breed anger and aggression, develop depression and trigger post-traumatic stress responses. This legislation uses the state-of-the-art evidence on what works for youth, and allows the federal system to lead the way for states to implement effective strategies to reduce their reliance on restraints and isolation to keep youth safe and to discipline them when they break

institutional rules. This bill limits the use of solitary confinement to emergency situations in which brief and temporary confinement is necessary to prevent physical harm.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act addresses a second important concern in the juvenile justice field: sealing and expungement of juvenile records. Our nation's juvenile justice system was founded on the principle of heightened privacy for youth because of the unique capacity of young people to change; as such, removal of the stigma and barriers associated with having a record for nonviolent acts committed while under 18 is a critical step in the successful transition of youth to adulthood. In many circumstances, this bill would allow youth to move past the mistakes of their adolescence and pursue the same opportunities for success as their peers.

Finally, this bill establishes the possibility of sentence modification for juveniles who have been incarcerated in the federal system for twenty years or more, conditional on the demonstration that the individual poses no threat to public safety and on the basis that it is in the interest of justice to provide such modification. This bill provides stiff requirements for eligibility while incorporating the latest knowledge about young people's capacity for forethought, remorse, and rehabilitation, features which adolescent science confirms develop over a period of years. S. 1917 allows young people the chance to work toward a second review after a substantial period of imprisonment, while mandating that the characteristics and environment of their youth be taken into consideration. This will also bring the United State federal government into compliance with several recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings that have struck down the use of extreme sentences for youth.

The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2017 goes far in realigning the American juvenile justice system with its defining principles. As such, we support the juvenile components fully. We look forward to working with you and to the passage of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
Campaign for Youth Justice
Center for Children's Law and Policy
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Corrections Education Association
First Focus Campaign for Children
Futures Without Violence
Justice Policy Institute
Juvenile Justice Coalition (Ohio)
Mennonite Central Committee – Washington Office
MomsRising
NAACP

National Disability Rights Network
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Partnership for Juvenile Services
Rights4Girls
The Sentencing Project
Southern Poverty Law Center
SparkAction
Strategies for Youth, Inc.
Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform
The W. Haywood Burns Institute