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

S860 would reauthorize and strengthen the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) to support state efforts to improve their juvenile justice systems, protect kids, and build safer communities

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Today, the Senate approved, through unanimous consent, S860, The Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Reauthorization Act of 2017 which strengthens and updates the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP A).

“We applaud Chairman Grassley and Senator Whitehouse for their persistent leadership on this bill, and thank Senator Paul for his efforts to ensure that children who haven’t committed a crime stay out of secure detention. We remain hopeful that, when enacted, the reauthorization will include provisions that ensure an end to the incarceration of young people who have run away from home, and other children in need of services,” said Naomi Smoot, Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and co-chair for the Act-4-JJ campaign, which advocates for the reauthorization of this law.

President Gerald Ford first signed the JJDP A into law on September 7, 1974; it was last reauthorized in 2002 and is now nearly a decade overdue for reauthorization. The law remains the only federal statute that sets out national standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system and provides direction and support for state juvenile justice system improvements. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a similar bill, HR1809, “The Juvenile Justice and Reform Act of 2017” on May 24, 2017. The House and Senate will now have to come to an agreement on the provisions found in the two bills before it can be signed into law.

“Today we celebrate a victory for children. The bi-partisan passage of this law will continue to support states’ ability to keep children and youth out of the justice system, protect those young people in custody, and advance evidence-based practices to help youth get back on track and keep communities safe,” said Marcy Mistrett, Co-chair of the Act4JJ Campaign and CEO of the

Campaign for Youth Justice. “We commend the leadership and co-sponsors for their strong bipartisan vision on juvenile justice reform and we look forward to continuing to work closely with Senate and House members toward final passage this year.”

S860 would build upon these national standards by reducing the placement of youth in adult jails pre-trial, and providing more structure to the law’s requirement to decrease racial and ethnic disparities. The bill also promotes the use of alternatives to incarceration; supports the implementation of trauma-informed, evidence-based practices; calls for the elimination of dangerous practices in confinement, including eliminating the use of restraints on pregnant girls; improves conditions and educational services for incarcerated youth; focuses on the particular needs of special youth populations such as trafficked youth and Tribal youth; and increases accountability.

In addition Senators Grassley and Whitehouse, the bill is cosponsored by Sen. Booker (D-NJ), Sen. Blunt (R-MO), Sen. Cornyn (R-TX), Sen. Durbin (D-IL), Sen. Ernst (R-IA), Sen. Feinstein (D-CA), Sen. Franken (D-MN), Sen. Hatch (R-UT), Sen. Klobuchar (D-MN), Sen. Leahy (VT), Sen. Rubio (R-FL), Sen. Tillis (R-NC).

For more information go to www.ACT4JJ.org

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