

May 31, 2016

Mayor Muriel Bowser  
Executive Office of the Mayor  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Members of the Council of the District of  
Columbia  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser and Councilmembers:

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly endorse Bill 21-0683, the “Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act of 2016.” This bill, introduced by Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie and co-introduced by six colleagues, would bring critical reforms to the District of Columbia’s juvenile justice system that prioritize rehabilitation, reduce over-incarceration, restore judicial discretion, promote humane confinement, enhance agency oversight, and protect young immigrants.

We know that an overreliance on incarceration – especially when coupled with the inhumane practices of shackling, solitary confinement, and extreme sentences – irreparably harms the healthy development of our children and makes our city less safe. Housing youth in adult facilities limits their access to effective social services and behavioral health programs, while exposing them to further violence. Inappropriate adult environments re-traumatize young people, making it harder for them to successfully reintegrate into their communities upon release. Moreover, securely detaining low risk youth pre-trial removes them from the community-based services and connections they need to succeed, increasing the likelihood that they will reoffend. Finally, secure confinement is the wrong tactic for our youngest children, who desperately need supportive, age-appropriate environments that directly address the underlying causes of their behavior.

The “Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act of 2016” limits the use of these ineffective and unjustifiably harsh tactics. The bill ensures that every detained young person will be housed in humane, age-appropriate and risk-appropriate facilities, supports the courts in the application of more age-appropriate sanctions, promotes restorative justice in prosecutions, protects young victims of abuse and neglect from deportation, and requires our government agencies to better track the success of their juvenile justice programming. Some of these overdue reforms align with nationwide trends. Other provisions of the bill will continue the District’s rise as a national leader in youth justice.

Given our collective experience serving and advocating for young people and their families here and around the country, we know that this legislation is a step in the right direction. Therefore, we ask the Council of the District of Columbia to support the legislation as it moves forward. We ask the Mayor to ensure that the bill is signed into law, funded, and faithfully implemented.

Sincerely,

AccessYouth	Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop
African American Ministers In Action	Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative
Alliance of Concerned Men	HIPS
Alliance for Justice & Education	Jews United for Justice
Amara Legal Center	Justice for Juniors, Baptist College Chaplaincy
American Civil Liberties Union - DC	Justice Policy Institute
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth	Kids in Need of Defense
Campaign for Youth Justice	Kid Power Inc.
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition	Latin American Youth Center
CARECEN	Law for Black Lives – DC
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington	Life Pieces to Masterpieces
Children's Center for Law and Policy	Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church
Children's Law Center	MICAH Leadership Council
Clínica del Pueblo	Mid-Atlantic Juvenile Defender Center
Council for Court Excellence	NAACP – DC Branch
Council of Churches, Greater Washington	National Juvenile Justice Network
Critical Exposure Fellows	National Association of Social Workers (NASW), DC Metro Chapter
DC Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers	Open City Advocates
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates	Peace with Justice Ministry of Foundry UMC
DC Law Students in Court	Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US & Canada
DC Lawyers for Youth	Rights4Girls
DC Scores	
Fair Budget Coalition	

Sasha Bruce Youthwork

SchoolTalk

Sitar Arts Center

Stand Up for Kids DC

Stop Police Terror Project

The DC Center for the LGBT Community

The DC Prisoners' Project,  
Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil  
Rights & Urban Affairs

The Propel Foundation, Incorporated

The Sentencing Project

The Took Crowell Institute for Youth,  
U.D.C. David A. Clarke School of Law

Whitman Walker Health

Young Women's Project