



Investing in the Return Home: Strategies for Improving Juvenile Justice

October 27, 2026

Who We Are



JustUSCC.org

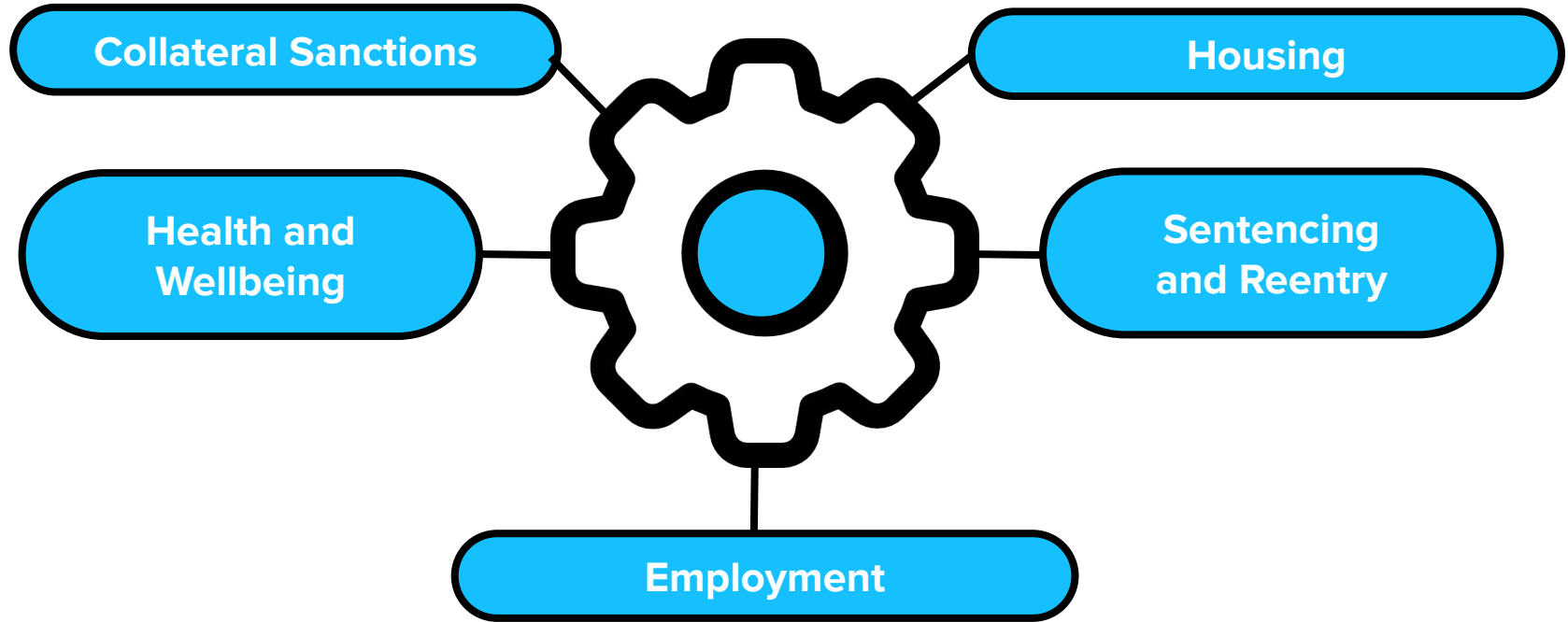
The JCC is a national federal policy table led by and created for individuals who are directly impacted. The JCC forms the connective tissue needed to catalyze full participation in policy practices and changes for formerly incarcerated people and directly impacted individuals and their communities.

Our Why



The voices of those most impacted by the criminal legal system have been missing and/or excluded from decision-making tables.

Priorities



Centered back to people



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVOCACY



JJDPA AND YOUTH JUSTICE ACTION MONTH

INTRODUCTION

Melissa Milchman, CJJ Executive Director

Melissa connects the dots in youth justice—bringing together everyone from policymakers and practitioners, to young leaders, families, and lived experts, and is focused on getting them to actually work together to improve outcomes for system impacted youth and families. A lawyer by training and a people-person by nature, she builds collaborative change by day and wrangles two small humans by night from sunny Florida.



ACT4JJ advocates for the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) and for federal funding for juvenile justice programs and services, which fund opportunities such as reentry support, education opportunities, workforce development, mentoring, counseling and other evidence-based supports for at risk and justice impacted youth.



WHAT IS THE JJDP

The JJDP created and designated the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as the federal home for youth justice programs and policies in the U.S. Department of Justice. It was designed to establish up a federal-state partnership for delinquency prevention and youth justice system improvement efforts.

The JJDP is the only federal law to:

- **Set federally protected standards of care** for youth that enter the justice system.
- **Fund programs** at the state and local level using Title II Formula Grant dollars.

OJJDP was created to:

- Provide training and technical assistance to states/territories,
- Funnel Title II funding to states/territories,
- Conduct research and evaluation to support youth justice efforts.

To partner with OJJDP, each state/territory selects a **Designated State Agency (DSA)** to receive technical and financial assistance from the OJJDP. To implement the JJDP each state creates a **State Advisory Group (SAG)** that supports strategic planning, investments, and initiatives that are responsive to state and local needs.

IMPACT: WHY THE JJDPA?

The JJDPA has made significant progress improving the youth justice system including:

- Substantially **decreasing youth incarceration rates.**
- Youth in residential placement has dropped by over 50%.
- Status offenders held in secure detention facilities decreased by 96%.
- Sight and sound contact between youth and adult offenders has decreased by 99%.
- Disproportionate detention of Black youth decreased by 54%.



WHAT IS YOUTH JUSTICE ACTION MONTH (YJAM)?

Held every October, Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM) serves as an important reminder of the value and power of young people.

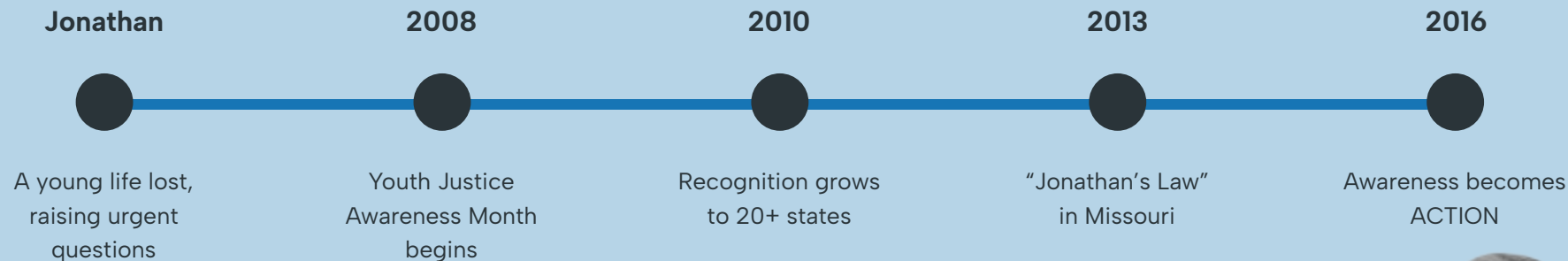
This yearly observance raises awareness about the unique challenges that young people who are criminalized and separated from their families and communities face and uplifts advocacy that calls for less harmful, community driven, healing and developmentally appropriate responses.

YJAM is a reminder that change happens when youth, advocates, families, and communities work together to holistically address youth who offend, elevate youth voice, and reimagine a system rooted in healing and opportunity—not punishment.



YJAM: From Awareness to Action

The story behind the movement



"Awareness became organizing. Organizing became advocacy. Advocacy contributed to policy change."



YJAM Advocacy Commitment

If you could change ONE thing for young people in your community,
what would it be?

Who has the power to change it?

Who can join you?

What can you ask for?

What action can you take?

One voice → community effort → advocacy → movement

YJAM Activation Example

Read for Youth Justice: Advocacy Through Books & Storytelling

Read for Youth Justice is partnering with:

- American Library Association
- Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop

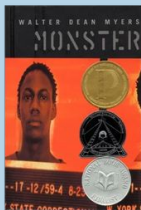
Ways You Can Take Action

- 📖 Encourage your local library to participate
- 🧠 Invite your network to get involved
- ✍️ Write a 500-word-or-less book review from the 2026 reading list
- 📚 Use books and storytelling to start conversations about youth justice

Inviting your network to reach out to their local libraries



Write a book review

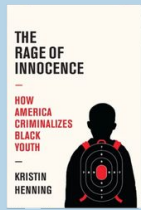


YOUNG ADULT

Monster

by Walter Dean Myers

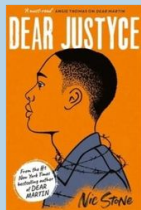
★ CHALLENGED/BANNED BOOK



NON FICTION

The Rage of Innocence

by Kristin Henning

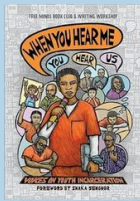


YOUNG ADULT

Dear Justyce

by Nic Stone

★ CHALLENGED/BANNED BOOK



POETRY

When you hear me (you hear us)

by Free Minds Book Club
& Writing Workshop



Visit

youthjusticeactionmonth.org



HELPFUL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

- ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH –
 - [YOUTH ACTIVIST TOOLKIT](#)
- UNICEF –
 - [YOUTH ADVOCACY GUIDE](#)
- NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW –
 - [FEDERAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT](#)
- THE YOUTH CAFE –
 - [ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE](#)

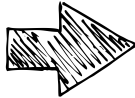
Q&A

Questions • Ideas • YJAM Activations

**“You can start where you are, with what you know, and
with the voice you have right now.”**



CJJ's Newsletter



Thank you for helping build a future where youth thrive.



The Forum envisions a world in which
**All young people reach their fullest potential—
in education, work, and life**



Reconnecting Youth Campaign (RYC)



THE
**RECONNECTING
YOUTH** CAMPAIGN
UNLEASHING LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

Since 2017, RYC has been a coalition of national, state, and local organizations working to scale effective evidence-based federally funded programs that connect young people to education and workforce training.



**NATIONAL
SKILLS COALITION**



**children's
defense fund**



**NATIONAL
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT
COALITION**



**Jobs for
the Future**



The Corps Network
Strengthening America through
service and conservation

- The Reconnecting Youth Campaign continues to host **VIRTUAL** and **IN-PERSON** convenings to help individuals and organizations advocate for federal funding for Opportunity Youth (OY).





Federal Levers and Advocacy

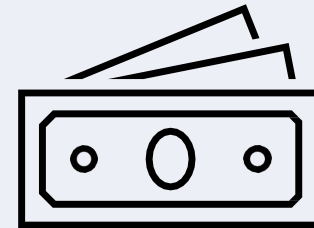


Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

- WIOA authorizes the nation's publicly funded workforce development system and is the largest federal investment in job training and education programs.
- The Youth Program focuses primarily on “out-of-school” youth, requiring local areas to expend a minimum of 75% of WIOA youth funds on this group.
- WIOA is up for reauthorization and there is bipartisan interest in the House and Senate.



- We focus on programs including:
 - WIOA Youth Activities
 - Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO)
- Both have seen proposals to eliminate or consolidate.
- October 1st started FY27 and federal programs are operating through a short-term funding bill that goes until December 11, 2026.





In-District Work

- Collaborative campaign framework emphasizes youth and community voice, equity, local, state, and federal collaboration, and systems change.
- Upcoming opportunities for federal and state engagement, such as WIOA reauthorization and funding Opportunity Youth programming
- Narrative change and an emphasis on aligning messaging, showing data, and sharing youth stories to influence policymakers.

Watch the Training



Learn more about the work RYC partners have been doing at the federal level and how advocates like you can leverage your own advocacy perspectives to support Opportunity Youth during Congress's August recess.

Download the Toolkit



Our comprehensive toolkit includes everything you need to set up and hold an effective meeting with your elected representatives.

[DOWNLOAD](#)

<https://www.reconnectingyouthcampaign.org/take-action>



Youth Engagement in Advocacy and Policy



What is the Opportunity Youth Congressional Liaison **forum** (OYCL) Program?

A three-month paid fellowship for youth ages 16 to 26, equipping them with the skills and tools they need to directly advocate to lawmakers.

OYCL program participants:

- Build advocacy skills to speak directly with lawmakers
- Join biweekly trainings, check-ins, and assignments
- Connect with peers and share lived experiences
- Participate in a program designed with and for Opportunity Youth to push for more equitable access to opportunity



Our Purpose



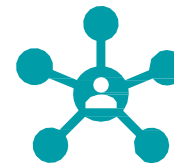
Remove
Barriers



Change Systems
& Policies



Meet Youth &
Families
Where They Are



Cross
Collaboration



Champion
Community
Change



Lift Up Local &
State Efforts



Pass the Mic



What Makes OYCL Unique

- Earn While You Learn
- Meet the OYCLs where they are.
- Puts you in direct contact with your congressional member and their offices
- Trains on federal and state policy
- Expands your professional network
- Continued advocacy and policy support





Elianna Nayelli Peña | Long Beach, CA

I am from Long Beach, California,



Stay In Touch



Join the list.

Subscribe to our newsletter to be the first to hear about resources, events, and more from the Forum.



SCAN THE QR CODE

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Follow updates on LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-reconnecting-youth-campaign>



Check out our advocacy toolkit:

<https://www.reconnectingyouthcampaign.org/take-action>

Contact Us



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Who We Are

The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY) is a national nonprofit that leads efforts to end life without parole and other extreme sentences for children who cause harm; advances alternative responses that focus on their unique characteristics as children, including their capacity for change; and creates opportunities for formerly incarcerated youth to thrive as adults and lead in their communities.



The **CAMPAIGN** for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of **YOUTH**



Our Leadership Model

Directly impacted leadership is central to the CFSY's work. "Despite growing up in the system, despite all that has happened to us, we consistently prove that we are worthy of these opportunities," says Xavier McElrath-Bey, once a child sent to adult prison and now the Executive Director of the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth.



Our Movement Building Community

The **Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN)** is national network of formerly incarcerated adults that were sentenced to extreme or life sentences as children. ICAN provides support for its members and empowers them to create positive change in their communities.

The **National Family Network (NFN)** is a community of people impacted by youth violence, including individuals whose loved ones are serving extreme sentences for crimes committed as children, as well as individuals who have lost loved ones to youth violence. NFN engages in dialogue, action planning, and information sharing to advance efforts to end extreme sentences for youth.



Factsheets & Resources

Juvenile life without parole

Unusual. Unequal.



PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 2023

FACT SHEET: Second Chances for Children in the Criminal Legal System

The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth and the National Center for Victims of Crime are committed to educating the public about the experiences of children who have been sentenced to a life or life equivalent sentence for a crime committed as a youth. This population has disproportionately experienced trauma and violence, and we believe that the provision of trauma-informed services for child survivors of crime can promote well-being and healing and prevent future harm.

Many children who commit acts of violence have experienced abuse or neglect within their homes

- Over 90 percent of youth entering the criminal legal system have experienced abuse or neglect.¹
- In a sample of children sentenced to life without parole:²
 - 79 percent witnessed violence in the home, and nearly half experienced physical abuse.
 - More than half witnessed weekly violence in their neighborhoods.
 - Among women sentenced to life without parole as children, 77 percent reported being sexually abused.
- The incarceration of a parent is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that poses threats to a child's emotional, physical, educational, and financial well-being.
 - Some studies suggest that children of incarcerated parents are up to six times more likely to become incarcerated themselves.³



July 2026

NOT A MONOLITH: PERSPECTIVES FROM SURVIVORS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

Created by Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY) with pro bono assistance from Baker McKenzie, our new report "Not a Monolith: Perspectives from Survivors of Youth Violence" highlights the experiences and perspectives of community members impacted by youth violence, including those who have survived it and those who have lost loved ones. We are honored to know the people featured in this report, who are members of CFSY's National Family Network (NFN) and Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN).

"All too often, media featuring people who have lost loved ones to violence disproportionately highlights individuals who support punitive policies and retribution. As a result, many people never encounter survivors like me who speak out in favor of mercy, redemption, and second chances for people convicted in cases involving violence, even as many of us share this belief!"

- Sharlette Evans

Executive Director, National Center for Victims of Crime

To partner with CFSY, reach us at info@cfsy.org

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In a national survey, most victims of crime preferred that the legal system focus more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes (57%) rather than punishing them (42%).



Children who commit acts of violence are also frequently victims of violent crime themselves. In one study, youth who were the victims of a violent offense were three times more likely to commit a violent offense in the next twelve months than those who were not victims.³



Download the full report at info@cfsy.org

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY



April 30, 2020

New Study Finds 1% Recidivism Rate Among Released Philly Juvenile Lifers

Research from Montclair State University faculty shows that people age out of crime

Posted in: **Faithy Voices, Graduate School, Humanities and Social Sciences, Research**

A new study conducted by Montclair State University faculty members Tanika Daftary-Kapur and Tina Zottoli has found a recidivism rate (defined as reconviction for any offense) of just 1.14% among people who were sentenced as juveniles in Philadelphia to life without the possibility of parole and then subsequently released.

The team's findings in the study, titled, "Resentencing of Juvenile Lifers: The Philadelphia Experience" are consistent with a growing body of scientific research that shows people age out of criminal behaviors, that lengthy sentences fail to deter crime, and that lengthy prison terms both divert funds from public health and safety initiatives, and are counterproductive to strengthening families and communities.

"Our work brings into question the commonly held belief that those incarcerated for violent offenses will reoffend. Here we have a group of individuals, all convicted of murder, with an approximately 1% recidivism rate," says Daftary-Kapur, the lead study author and an associate professor of Justice Studies at Montclair State.



Truth in Sentencing, Incentives and Recidivism[†]

David C. Macdonald¹

April 25, 2024

Abstract

Truth in Sentencing has eliminated discussion in prison release. This decreases the incentive for rehabilitative effort among prisoners. I use a regression discontinuity design to exploit a change in these incentives created by the introduction of TIS in Arizona. Before prison, I find that sentences were reduced by 20% for TIS offenders. Further, I find that rate infractions decreased by 22% to 55% and education enrollment fell by 54%. After release, I find offenders were 4.8 p.p. more likely to reoffend. I further find that recidivism and infractions effects are largest among drug and violent offenders. Finally, I show that the reduction in sentences resulted in a broad equalization of time served at the cutoff, which indicates that the removal of early-release incentives by TIS was the main mechanism driving results.

Keywords: crime, deterrence, prison, Truth in Sentencing, recidivism.
JEL Codes: I76, K14, K42

[†]There are no current funding sources to declare for this project. Thanks to William Axtell, Patrick Beale, Thomas Davidoff, Jennifer DeBruin, Marlene Dickman, Charles Fenn, Nicole Fortin, Jonathan Ganes, David Green, Jeffrey Hicks, Kristina Hinesman, Megan Kato, Thomas Lonsdale, Neil Luedtke, Anushka Marathe, Yaelin Menon, Brian McClelland, Kevin Milligan, Anna Mills, Emily Nis, Jon Nivens, Emily O'Neil, Thomas Polakakis, Alan Rabin, Barbara Rapp, Kevin Schepel, Paul Schiraldi, and Yusef Shera for their helpful comments and discussions.

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Unusual and Unequal Report

National Center for Victims of Crime Factsheet

Not a Monolith: Perspectives from Survivors of Youth Violence

Study on 1.14% recidivism rate of juvenile lifers

Study on parole improving safety outcomes in and outside of prison

Contact



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Community Care Programs

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Sign up for email updates
on ending the extreme
sentencing of children!



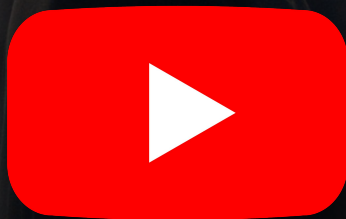
@theCFSY



The **CAMPAIGN** for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of **YOUTH**

REPRESENT
JUSTICE

REPRESENT JUSTICE PRESENTS



DIRECTED BY **EDDIE ELLIS**

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER REPRESENT JUSTICE PRODUCED BY SALADIN WHITE II | OURFREEDOM COLLECTIVE | EDDIE ELLIS
CAMILLE ELLIS SUPERVISING DIRECTOR & STORY PRODUCER SALADIN WHITE II CINEMATOGRAPHY BY TAJ DEVORE-BEY
EDITED BY TAJ DEVORE-BEY MUSIC BY SIMON J. LI



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