



BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

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## **New Report: Increase in Number of Youth at DC Jail, Youth Spend up to 23 ½ Hours Locked Up in Cells**

### *Advocates Call for Immediate Reform*

(Washington D.C.) – On July 25, the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) will release a report, *A Capital Offense: Youth in DC's Adult Criminal Justice System and Strategies for Reform*, examining the status of children in the District of Columbia's adult criminal justice system. As of May, the D.C. jail held 42 youth pre-trial, compared to 14 last year. Many of these youth – some as young as 15 years of age – were sent to adult jail without review by a judge or court hearing.

“This population is of incredible importance because they are often the most targeted or talked about group in policy discussion about juvenile crime,” says Dr. Jennifer Woolard, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Georgetown University. “Yet from a research perspective, we are only beginning to understand the developmental impact of incarcerating youth with adult offenders.”

The report's findings show that youth in D.C. jail can spend up to 23 and a half hours a day locked up in their cells. Initial data as well as accounts from youth indicate that the experience of being confined in close contact with adults can have severe consequence on a young person's development. Youth detained in the D.C. jail do not benefit from the extensive reform measures currently under implementation at the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services. The report also sheds light on the lack of appropriate educational and rehabilitative programs and services available to youth in adult facilities.

Kelli Taylor, Executive Director of Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop meets every week with young male inmates and asserts that youth in D.C. jail are “at a crucial crossroads in their life. They may be facing big time, but they're also very young. Our focus is on these kids having access to education. It can mean all the difference.”

Youth who go on to receive a sentence of incarceration in an adult prison, come under the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). These youth are typically placed in facilities hundreds of miles from home, in states as far as Tennessee, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. Separated from their communities and families, and often subject to verbal, psychological, and physical abuse by fellow inmates and guards, youth confined in adult facilities are more likely to recidivate and lead unstable lives. In fact, the transfer of youthful offenders to the adult criminal justice system does not promote public safety, but rather, achieves the opposite effect.

“Kids leave adult facilities with poor social skills, poor coping skills, and very poor preparation to enter the labor market,” says Dr. Donna Bishop, a professor at Northeastern University’s College of Criminal Justice. She explains that “even if they don't go into adult correctional facilities, they must deal with the stigma of an adult conviction. Employers don't want to hire them. Potential spouses don't want to date them. Without jobs, without support, and encountering a lot of resistance when they make efforts to improve themselves, it’s no wonder that they so readily return to crime.”

Dr. Woolard praises *A Capital Offense* for “bringing together important information on this understudied but over generalized population.” Woolard also states that “Historically, the nation’s capital is an important place to examine these issues because it was a DC case - *Kent v. United States* that established parameters of criteria for transfer [to the adult criminal justice system] in the first place.”

The report makes the following recommendations, which have been endorsed by local advocates in a letter to the Mayor and D.C. City Council:

- End the pretrial placement of youth in the adult jail;
- Require that all transfer cases be decided by a judge;
- Provide a “reverse” waiver mechanism for youth in adult court to be returned to juvenile jurisdiction when appropriate;
- Encourage the Federal Bureau of Prisons to contract with the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services so that youth can serve out their sentences close to home and
- Collect and analyze data on youth tried and sentenced as adults on an on-going basis.

“What we really need to do is address the endemic causes – racism, classism and criminalization of youth which make it more likely for youth of color attending public schools in the nation’s capital to end up in prison rather than college,” says Shani O’Neil, Director of Justice for DC Youth! Coalition (JDCY!), a diverse, inter-generational group that is pushing for a fair and more effective juvenile justice system in the District.



*The Campaign for Youth Justice (C4YJ) is a national organization dedicated to ending the practice of trying, sentencing and incarcerating youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. For more information, visit: [www.campaign4youthjustice.org](http://www.campaign4youthjustice.org)*