

**For Immediate Release
May 6, 2008**

**CFYJ Contact: Eric Solomon
(202) 558-3580 x20
esolomon@cfyj.org**

**NJJN Contact: Sarah Bryer
(202) 467-0864 x105
bryer@juvjustice.org**

**MCCD Contact: Michelle Weemhoff
(517) 482-4161
mweemhoff@miccd.org**

Michigan Advocate Receives the National Mother of Distinction Award for Efforts in Championing Change in the Juvenile Justice System

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD) presented Lois DeMott with the National Mother of Distinction Award. This award, sponsored by the Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) and the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), is presented each Mother's Day to one or more mothers who have made an outstanding contribution to the juvenile justice field through working for reform in the juvenile justice system or changing the practice of trying, sentencing, or incarcerating youth in the adult criminal justice system.

MCCD, through its membership in NJJN, nominated DeMott for this honor in recognition for her tireless advocacy on behalf of her son and to raise awareness about the realities of incarcerating youth in adult jails and prisons. The ceremony took place at the Capitol Building in Lansing.

“Lois’ struggle to access mental health services for her son, while heartbreaking, is not uncommon,” says Elizabeth Arnovits, executive director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency. “Our prisons are no place for kids with mental illness, yet we continue to defund mental health courts and treatment options. Lois is a true hero for fighting for these vulnerable children.”

DeMott has become a parent leader in Michigan to keep youth out of adult jails and prisons and get them the mental health services they need. DeMott’s son, Kevin, struggled with several mental health conditions since the age of three. Desperate to access adequate mental health services for Kevin, DeMott was advised to seek help from the legal system. Instead of help, Kevin was sentenced as an adult at age 15, and a series of placements, including adult prison, exposed him to greater danger, including abuse and isolation. Despite stress, illness, and debt resulting from her tireless efforts to fight for Kevin while in prison, DeMott remains her son’s greatest advocate. Because of her, Kevin, now 17, has been paroled and is receiving the help he needs.

"I've never known anyone to devote their entire life to this cause as much as this woman," says Amy Winans, of the Association for Children's Mental Health. "She turned her heartache into making a difference for other people, and she never lost sight of that goal."

DeMott made it her mission to ensure that Kevin and other children with mental illness have the opportunity to receive intensive, in-home mental health services. She is now helping other children who remain in prison and spreading her message throughout the state as a parent activist. DeMott exemplifies a true champion for reform and lives by her own advice: "Don't ever give up on your child."

"We applaud Lois for her dedication and commitment to young people," says Liz Ryan, president & CEO of the Campaign for Youth Justice.

An estimated 200,000 youth are tried, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults every year across the United States. Most of the youth prosecuted in adult courts are charged with non-violent offenses.

Michigan adopted more Draconian laws in the mid-1990s, increasing the number of youth being tried and incarcerated as adults. Since then, over 500 children have been sent to adult prisons. Additionally, Michigan has over 320 individuals serving life sentences without the possibility of parole for offenses committed prior to their 18th birthdays.

Research shows that placing youth in the adult system decreases public safety and puts young people in danger. According to recent reports from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Justice, youth who are prosecuted in the criminal justice system are more likely than youth retained in the juvenile court system to be re-arrested for violent or other crimes. They are also 36 times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile detention facility.

The Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD) is Michigan's only statewide advocacy organization dedicated to assuring that the laws and policies aimed at controlling crime are fair, effective and affordable. For more information, visit www.miccd.org

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is 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.campaignforyouthjustice.org.

The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) enhances the capacity of state-based, juvenile justice organizations to advocate for fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate adjudication and treatment for all children, youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.