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U.S. Department of Justice Issues New Regulations Protecting Children in Adult Jails and Prisons from Sexual Abuse

Washington, D.C. – The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) applauds the U.S. Attorney General and the Department of Justice (DOJ) for listening to the overwhelming public support for protecting children in adult jails and prisons. In an announcement today, the DOJ released its [final standards](#) on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

The DOJ has adopted a standard that will restrict the placement of youth in adult facilities. The new rule indicates that “[a]s a matter of policy, the Department supports strong limitations on the confinement of adults with juveniles,” and the regulation issued today will protect youth from sexual abuse by limiting contact between youth and adults through three specific requirements:

- Banning the housing of youth in the general adult population.
- Prohibiting contact between youth and adults in common areas, and ensuring youth are constantly supervised by staff.
- Limiting the use of isolation which causes or exacerbates mental health problems for youth.

“The PREA standards will protect hundreds of thousands of kids prosecuted in the adult system every year, and get us one step closer to completely removing youth from adult jails and prisons” said CFYJ President and CEO Liz Ryan. “We hope that as States implement these important standards they use this opportunity to reconsider the practice of trying youth as adults overall.”

Every year, about 250,000 children are exposed to the dangers of the adult criminal justice system. The states that will be most affected by this new rule are the 13 states (NC, NY, CT, GA, IL, LA, MA, MO, MI, NH, SC, TX, and WI) which end juvenile court jurisdiction at 16 or 17, instead of the age of 18. Although defined by state law as “adults”, this new rule clarifies that all youth under the age of 18 deserve extra protections. This new rule will also remove youth from the general population in adult facilities and protect youth held in isolation.

“I hear the horrific stories about prison rape and assault when I speak to my incarcerated son,” said Illinois Parent Grace Warren, whose son has been prosecuted as an adult. “I can sleep a little easier knowing that the PREA standards will protect him and the other kids across the country looking for a second chance in life.”

Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act in 2003 to stop sexual violence behind bars. The draft regulations released in 2011 did not protect youth in adult facilities. In response to the call for public comment, thousands of individuals, groups in every state across the country, national organizations, and professional associations of every type urged the Attorney General to protect youth in the justice system by banning the placement of youth in adult jails and prisons. Members of Congress also weighed in with the Department in support of a complete ban.

“As someone who spent time in prison as a teenager, this move by the DOJ demonstrates their commitment to the safety of young people, no matter the mistakes they have made, is of primary importance,” said CFYJ Spokesman R. Dwayne Betts, member of DOJ’s Federal Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice.

These federal regulations represent the first time the U.S. government has created national standards to eliminate sexual abuse in prisons, jails, juvenile detention facilities, community corrections facilities, and police lock-ups. State and local facilities must begin compliance one year after publication.

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The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) 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 background on this issue, please visit www.campaignforyouthjustice.org.