

*VIA U.S. MAIL*

July 16, 2008

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
United States Senate  
335 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-4124

**Re: Support for S. 3155 as amended by Senator Cardin**

Dear Senator Sessions,

I am writing to express my strong support for S. 3155, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2008, and for the amendment that Senator Cardin intends to advance to phase out the Valid Court Order (VCO) Exception over three years. This amendment would phase out a provision of the Act that allows non-criminal youth ("status offenders") to be incarcerated for failing to comply with court orders. The current bill allows these children to be incarcerated for 7 days. S. 3155 meaningfully updates and improves many of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) core requirements and creates a strong framework of federal standards for states and localities to use to strengthen families and prevent juvenile delinquency. By not incarcerating these non-criminal youth, we can save millions of dollars that can be used to fund cost-effective community-based programs, such as the Evening Reporting Centers, Day Treatment Programs, and Reception Center models now being explored in Mobile and Birmingham.

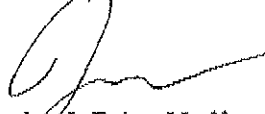
Although I recognize there may be controversy surrounding Senator Cardin's amendment, I urge you to support it, not only because it is the right thing to do for the nation's children, but because Alabama is already at the forefront of the effort to reform juvenile justice system practices. The Alabama Juvenile Justice Act of 2008, signed into law this May by Governor Riley, included a provision dramatically limiting the VCO Exception in Alabama. Despite some initial disagreement, the bill passed both chambers of the Alabama legislature by unanimous votes and received strong backing from judges – Democrat and Republican alike – throughout the state. In fact, a quorum of Republican judges (including myself) wrote to Governor Riley to express our support for the legislation the week before he signed the bill into law. We did not write to him, and nor do I write to you, because of self-interest or partisanship. This is not a partisan issue, but a moral one: all people, of all political inclinations, can agree that children who have not committed a crime should not be treated like criminals. Doing so destroys lives and prevents us from growing strong and healthy communities in Alabama and across the nation.

You may hear judges or other legislators argue that this legislation would tie their hands, handicapping them as they attempt to serve the cause of justice. But I don't believe that justice can be served by punishing non-criminal children with the same sanctions we rightly use for those youth who are truly a danger to their communities. This legislation is designed to protect the health and

wellbeing of vulnerable children who have not committed crimes, to keep families and communities safe and intact, and will push us to think both locally and nationally about new and innovative ways to address the root causes of children's misbehavior.

Thank you for considering S. 3155. I hope you will give the bill and Senator Cardio's amendment your full support and swift passage through the Senate Judiciary Committee. If I can be of any service to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to call on me.

Sincerely yours,



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