July 17, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
530 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
135 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Senator Whitehouse:

We, the undersigned—representing more than 80 national, state, and local organizations and hundreds of thousands of constituents—thank you for your leadership in sponsoring S. 1169, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2015. The bill strengthens and updates the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA), which has provided States and localities with federal standards and supports for improving juvenile justice and delinquency prevention practices and contributed to safeguards for youth, families and communities for more than 40 years, and we are grateful that you have made it a priority this Congress.

Despite a continuing decline in youth crime and delinquency, more than 60,000 young people are held in detention centers awaiting trial or confined by the courts in juvenile facilities in the U.S. For these confined youth, and the many more kids at-risk of involvement in the justice system, the JJDPA and programs it supports are critical. Youth who are locked up are separated from their families, and many witness violence. These youth struggle when they get out, trying to complete high school, get jobs, housing, or go to college. Aside from the human toll, the financial costs of maintaining large secure facilities have also made it vital to rethink juvenile justice in every community.

Premised on research-based understandings of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, S. 1169 reaffirms a national commitment to the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system; one that supports developmentally appropriate practices that treat as many youth as possible in their communities. It advances important improvements to the JJDPA, its core requirements and its central purposes, provides enhanced safeguards for youth in the system, increases community safety, and ensures progress toward racial fairness.

Since the last JJDPA reauthorization was approved in 2002, there have been many developments in the field of juvenile justice that significantly impact practitioners’ work. S. 1169 recognizes and addresses many of these developments in several key ways. Specifically, we are pleased that the bill:

1. Strengthens the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) core requirement by calling on states to phase-out use of the Valid Court Order Exception that currently causes non-offending youth/status offenders to be locked up.
2. Extends the adult Jail Removal and Sight and Sound Separation core requirements to apply to juveniles held pretrial, whether charged in juvenile or adult court.

3. Gives States and localities clear direction on the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) protection to plan and implement data-driven approaches to ensure fairness and reduce racial and ethnic disparities, to set measurable objectives for reduction of disparities in the system, and to publicly report such efforts.

4. Encourages States to eliminate dangerous practices in confinement and to promote adoption of best practices and standards.

5. Recognizes the impact of exposure to violence and trauma on adolescent behavior and development.

6. Encourages investment in community-based alternatives to detention; encourages family engagement in design and delivery of treatment and services; improves screening, diversion, assessment, and treatment for mental health and substance abuse needs; allows for easier transfer of education credits for system-involved youth; and calls for a focus on the particular needs of girls either in the system or at risk of entering the justice system.

7. Promotes fairness by supporting State efforts to expand youth access to counsel and encouraging programs that inform youth of opportunities to seal or expunge juvenile records once they have gotten their lives back on track.

8. Reauthorizes the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) program which helps states and localities reduce juvenile offending by providing judges and other juvenile justice officials with a range of age/developmentally-appropriate options to both hold youth accountable and get them back on track so they are less likely to reoffend.

9. Encourages transparency, timeliness, public notice, and communication on the part of OJJDP, its agents and the States.

10. Increases accountability to ensure effective use of resources, to provide greater oversight of grant programs, and to ensure state compliance with federal standards.

Given the significant gains reflected in S. 1169, we are pleased to endorse the bill and look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues toward final passage in the 114th Congress.

Respectfully submitted,
(in alphabetical order)

**National Organizations**
American Civil Liberties Union  
Boys Town  
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth  
Campaign for Youth Justice  
Center for Children’s Law and Policy  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children’s Advocacy Institute  
Children’s Defense Fund  
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness  
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office  
Coalition for Juvenile Justice  
Covenant House International
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Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team
SparkAction
Southern Poverty Law Center
Southwest Key
Strategies for Youth, Inc.
Student Peace Alliance
The Center for Public Representation
The Corps Network
The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare
The Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps
The Sentencing Project
The Social Action Commission of The African Methodist Episcopal Church
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
True Colors Fund
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
W. Haywood Burns Institute

**State and Regional Organizations**
180 Degrees, Inc.
ACCESS Education
Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) Seminole Nation of Oklahoma
Cass County Probation Department (Walker, Minn.)
Center for Children & Youth Justice (Washington)
Center for Juvenile Justice Reform/Georgetown University
Children’s Justice Clinic, Rutgers School of Law Camden
Citizens for Juvenile Justice (Boston, Mass.)
City of Stamford Youth Services Bureau
Columbia County Teen Court
Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
Crittenton Center (Iowa)
DeKalb County Court Services (Illinois)
Division of Youth Services (Arkansas)
Double R Consulting
Family and Youth Counseling Agency (Louisiana)
Hawaii Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group
Hawaii State Office of Youth Services
Handel IT
Homeboy Industries (Los Angeles, Ca.)
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Invictus Reentry Maryland
Jesuit Social Research Institute, Loyola University New Orleans
Juvenile Justice Coalition (Ohio)
Juvenile Justice Initiative of Illinois
Just Children (Virginia)
Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations (Michigan)
Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights
LUK, Inc. (Massachusetts)
Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group
Marion County Commission on Youth (Indiana)
MEN IN MOTION IN THE COMMUNITY
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency
National Juvenile Justice Network
Office of Restorative Justice, Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Ohio Department of Youth Services
Oregon Youth Court Association
PACE Center for Girls, Inc.
Rhode Island State Council of Churches
Richland County Public Defender’s Office
Salt Lake Area Gang Project
SAY San Diego
Sisters of Mercy, Mid-Atlantic Justice Office
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Justice Team
StarrVista
Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth
Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
The Anti-Recidivism Coalition
The Art of Yoga Project
The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking
The Northeast Regional Juvenile Defender Center
The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
The San Mateo County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission
Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles
Voices for Children in Nebraska
Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice
Wichita County Teen Court (Texas)
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
Yakima County Juvenile Court (Washington)
Youth Services of Fremont County Wyoming