



## **New Jersey Juvenile Justice Reform Coalition Applauds Enacted Juvenile Justice Reform Bill**

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NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Governor Christie's signature of S2003/A4299 will implement significant and much needed reforms to New Jersey's juvenile justice system. The bill, sponsored by Senators Nellie Pou and Raymond Lesniak, and Assembly Members Shavonda Sumter, Charles Mainor, Benjie Wimberly, and Maria Rodriguez-Gregg, recognizes the critical need for age-appropriate treatment and access to rehabilitation for juveniles who intersect with the criminal justice system. The new law:

- Raises the minimum age at which a child may be prosecuted as an adult from 14 to 15, narrows the list of offenses that can lead to prosecution as an adult, and amends the standard governing such decisions to reflect the continuing maturation of young people through their mid-twenties;
- Requires due process, including representation by counsel, before a young person who is confined in a juvenile facility can be transferred to an adult prison; and
- Eliminates the use of solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure in juvenile facilities and detention centers, and places time limits on the use of solitary confinement for reasons other than punishment, such as safety concerns.

The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Reform Coalition is pursuing system-wide reforms of New Jersey's juvenile justice system, including promoting alternatives to incarceration for youth and improving conditions of confinement for those who are incarcerated. Members of the Coalition's Steering Committee include Advocates for Children of New Jersey, the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, the Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest at Lowenstein Sandler, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, and Rutgers Law School Children's Justice Clinic in Camden and Criminal and Youth Justice Clinic in Newark.

Through legislative advocacy on this bill, as well as executive advocacy and litigation, the Coalition has sought to reform the process and circumstances under which youth may be placed in an adult prison, and to eliminate the practice of solitary confinement of juveniles. The Coalition applauds the extraordinary leadership of Senator Pou, who more than two years ago, began bringing together advocates (including members of the Coalition), retired judges, county prosecutors, the Attorney General's Office, and other stakeholders to discuss New Jersey's juvenile justice system and how to improve it through these substantial reforms.

"The historic reforms to New Jersey's juvenile justice system just signed into law will make us fairer, smarter, and safer. While there remains more work to do, these changes are a significant step towards making the 'justice' in our juvenile justice system a reality," says Alexander Shalom, Senior Staff Attorney at the ACLU of New Jersey.

"New Jersey will become the twenty-first state to prohibit the use of punitive solitary confinement by either law or practice, in line with a growing national trend. This is a first and significant step towards reducing the risk of serious harm to juveniles in secure facilities, but we still have a long way to go," explains Natalie Kraner, Pro Bono Counsel at Lowenstein Sandler. "The new law's data collection requirement is critical because it will afford transparency to the Juvenile Justice Commission's continued use of solitary confinement and protect against an overboard and prolonged use of non-punitive solitary confinement," adds Kraner.

"Serving time in an adult facility has enormous and lifelong consequences," remarks Laura Cohen, Director, Criminal and Youth Justice Clinic at Rutgers School of Law. In another important change, youth who have been waived for adult prosecution presumptively will be held in local juvenile detention centers, rather than county jails, while awaiting trial; similarly, any young person who is sentenced to a term of incarceration will be committed to the state's Juvenile Justice Commission until the age of 21 and may remain there beyond that time at the discretion of the Commission. "These reforms to the waiver laws are consistent with the substantial body of research establishing that adolescents' developmental immaturity renders them less culpable than adults," explains Cohen.

"While we agree that juveniles should be held accountable for their actions, we must treat juveniles who commit crimes differently than adults. These youth will return to their communities and we must equip them with the skills they need to stay out of trouble and mature into productive adults," says Mary Cogan, Assistant Director, Advocates for Children of NJ.

"This legislation represents a much-needed paradigm shift in how New Jersey addresses juvenile delinquency issues," adds LaShawn Warren, Vice President and General Counsel of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. "It moves the state closer to a rehabilitative model that appropriately factors in developmental considerations of youth and ensures progress toward racial fairness in the state juvenile justice system."

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