



For Immediate Release

April 30, 2015

Contact:

Naomi Smoot

Senior Policy Associate, Coalition for Juvenile Justice

(202) 467-0864, ext. 109

smoot@juvjustice.org

Bipartisan Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Introduced

New bill would reauthorize JJDPa and extend additional protections to children and youth in the juvenile justice system

Washington DC – Today Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) continued their bipartisan leadership to protect our young people by introducing a [bill](#) to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPa), our country’s broadest federal juvenile justice law.

“We are grateful for this bipartisan effort to reform our juvenile justice system. Sen. Whitehouse and Sen. Grassley’s leadership today highlights the importance of this issue and the need to come together across party lines to strengthen protections for our young people,” said Marie Williams, Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

The bill is similar to S. 2999, which the pair introduced in December 2014 near the end of the 113th Congress. Today, they renewed their commitment to reauthorizing and strengthening the JJDPa.

The JJDPa was first enacted 40 years ago and provides four core protections for young people who are involved in the juvenile justice system. The JJDPa requires that states address disproportionate minority contact (DMC) within their juvenile justice systems, ensures that children are not placed in adult jails, and requires that incarcerated youth and adults be separated by both sight and sound barriers. The JJDPa also prohibits the incarceration of children for status offenses, behaviors that violate the law only because the person engaging in them has not reached the age of adulthood.

Currently, the JJDPa contains an exception by which courts are permitted to jail children for these behaviors if the child is found in violation of a valid court order. In 2012 alone, this exception was used more than 7,000 times to jail young people for non-criminal conduct. The bill introduced today would bring a much-needed end to this practice by requiring states to phase out use of the so-called valid court order (VCO) exception.

The JJDP, last reauthorized by Congress in 2002, currently does not take into account many new developments that have since taken place in juvenile justice, including new research on adolescent brain development and the efficacy—and fiscal soundness—of community-based alternatives as compared to incarceration. The bill introduced today recognizes this and other innovations in juvenile justice.

The bill also includes new accountability measures that aim to ensure that states comply with the Act and the protections it affords young people.

“As forecasted, this bill—in addition to strengthening the core protections—seeks to tighten accountability of states for the JJDP monies they receive,” said Williams. “We are optimistic that the final legislation will ensure that this important interest is balanced with the need to provide states with the resources that are necessary for them to succeed.”

CJJ strongly supports this bill as an essential step forward in improving public safety in communities across this country and the lives of children and youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

###

The [Coalition for Juvenile Justice](#) (CJJ) envisions a nation where fewer children are at risk of delinquency; and if they are at risk or involved with the justice system, they and their families receive every possible opportunity to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives. CJJ is a nationwide coalition of State Advisory Groups (SAGs), individuals, organizations, and allies dedicated to preventing children and youth from becoming involved in the courts and upholding the highest standards of care when youth are charged with wrongdoing and enter the justice system.