

CLASP

Policy solutions that work for low-income people

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U. S Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

CC: Chairman Grassley, Senator Whitehouse, Congressman John Lewis, and Congressman Bobby Scott

Dear Mr. Speaker, Leader Pelosi, Senator McConnell, and Senator Schumer,

I write to you today to highlight the Center for Law and Social Policy's (CLASP) commitment to improving the juvenile justice system through the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) and ensuring that low-income youth and young people of color have education, youth development, and community supports that enable them to thrive. CLASP is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty nonprofit advancing policy solutions for low-income people. We work at both the federal and state levels, supporting policy and practice that makes a difference in the lives of people living in conditions of poverty. Moreover, CLASP focuses on preventative policies and diversion strategies that will keep youth from entering and reentering the justice system.

As you know, in 1974 the JJDP A was created¹ to "focus on preventing juvenile delinquency, deinstitutionalizing youth already in the system, and keeping juvenile offenders separate from the adult offenders." JJDP A was written to be reauthorized every five years. Unfortunately, JJDP A has not been reauthorized for over a decade and the current status of the bill is outdated. In its current form, it does not effectively hold states accountable to the federal standards of reducing disparities among youth of color, support youth on becoming productive members in society, or protect youth of color from being further marginalized.

Despite reduction of disproportionate minority contact being included in the existing JJDP A bill, data² shows that over the last decade minority youth are still being arrested at higher rates than their white peers. Additionally, studies³ show that youth who enter the justice system are less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to be incarcerated as an adult, costing states significant resources on incarceration. Reauthorizing and strengthening JJDP A can mitigate these issues and provide youth with

critical protections. It also will provide states with additional revenues to support youth prevention and effective interventions in the juvenile justice system. Yet, reauthorization has been stalled.

Just last year, bipartisan bills were passed in both chambers of Congress (H.R. 1809 and S. 860) to reauthorize the JJDP, with significant improvements that strengthen the core protections, ensure oversight, and support youth prevention. CLASP was encouraged by the momentum and commitment of all involved. Most importantly, these bills hold states accountable for reducing racial and ethnic disparities. JJDP provides explicit guidelines to states and localities to plan and implement data-driven approaches that ensure fairness and to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. States are also required to set measurable objectives for disparity reduction and share their reports publicly. Both versions of JJDP legislation recognize other aspects of youth life experience including environment, education, and past trauma. The bill acknowledges youth exposure to trauma and violence and its impact on their behavior and development and encourages states to ensure that programs and interventions are both evidence-based and trauma-informed.

Additionally, these bills will support increased youth growth and development. It deters court systems from sending youth to detention facilities and places a priority on rehabilitation in the community. They also include provisions to improve education progress for youth in the juvenile justice system, making it easier for youth to transfer and apply for educational credits to their local school system once released. The improvements to JJDP will create pathways for youth in the justice system to enter or reenter into employment or education opportunities and allow them to advance economically for themselves and their families.

These and other changes in reauthorization of the JJDP are vital to the future of our youth. Investing in our youth can help end generational poverty, support their growth and development, and increase economic mobility for our nation. The more youth we protect from entering the justice system and support in careers and education pathways the less poverty, racial disparities, and recidivism we will see. The reauthorization of JJDP is a win for everyone, but youth in the juvenile justice system depend on it.

So, as we approach the 44th anniversary of the JJDP, we urge you to take the swiftest path forward to reauthorization. If you have any questions or CLASP can be a resource to you or your staff please contact Alex Costello, our director of Legislative affairs at acostello@clasp.org or 202-906-8035. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Olivia Golden
Executive Director

¹ <https://cardenas.house.gov/sites/cardenas.house.gov/files/CRS%20-%20Juvenile%20Justice%20Overview.pdf>

² <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Racial-Disparities-in-Youth-Commitments-and-Arrests.pdf>

³ <https://voxeu.org/article/what-long-term-impact-incarcerating-juveniles>