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Bipartisan Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Introduced

S.B. 2999 would reauthorize JJDPa and extend additional protections to children and youth in the juvenile justice system.

Washington D.C. (DATE, 2014) – Today Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) introduced a bill that aims 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 youth," said Marie Williams, Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice. "We trust and believe that this commitment will be renewed and strengthened in the 114th Congress."

The measure, which was first enacted 40 years ago, 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. The bill introduced today by Sen. Whitehouse and Sen. Grassley 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.

“Reauthorization of the JJDPa is long overdue,” said Sarah Bryer, director of the National Juvenile Justice Network. “It gives crucial guidance to states on how to ensure their justice systems keep communities safe and protect children in trouble with the law. Yet the existing law hasn’t kept pace with what we’ve learned about how to do that.”

The JJDPa, 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.

CJJ and NJJN strongly support 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.

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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) 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.

The National Juvenile Justice Network is made up of 50 juvenile justice coalitions and organizations in 39 states that advocate for state and federal laws, policies and practices that are fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate for all children, youth and families involved in—or at risk of becoming involved in—the justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.