

February 6, 2017

The Honorable Cory Booker  
United States Senate  
359 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Booker,

On behalf of Juvenile Law Center and over 20 other organizations listed below, I write in strong support of the MERCY Act.

The MERCY Act would protect vulnerable young people from the harms of solitary confinement. Every day, across the United States, children are held in solitary confinement and other forms of isolation for days, weeks and even months. While confined, children are regularly deprived of the services, programming, and other tools that they need for healthy growth, education, and development. Many youth have absolutely nothing in their bare cells: no books, no pens and paper, no radio, no television, no person to speak with. Some youth are even deprived of mattresses, sheets, and clothing. Many are deprived of any opportunity to exercise, despite the importance of gross muscle movement for developing bodies.

Placing youth in solitary confinement can cause serious psychological, physical, and developmental harm. The bulk of research on solitary confinement has looked at the effect of isolation on prisoners of war. Even for this healthy group of adults, researchers have found that solitary confinement can cause hallucinations, disorientation, sleeplessness, paranoia, increased rage, and random impulsive violence, often self-directed. The risk of harm is even greater for children. In April 2012, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry issued a statement calling for an end to the practice of solitary confinement for juveniles, recognizing that “due to their developmental vulnerability, juvenile offenders are at particular risk of ... adverse reactions.”

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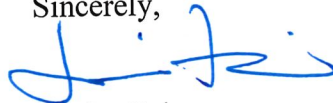
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The risk of suicide is particularly high for young people held in solitary confinement. Indeed, the majority of suicides in juvenile correctional facilities occur when the individual is in isolation. As the tragic case of Kalief Browder demonstrates, the risk of suicide and long-term harm from placing young people in solitary confinement can continue long after the individual has been released. Legislation is desperately needed to set a national example and to protect other youth from similar harm.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. We are grateful for your leadership on this issue, and look forward to continuing to work together as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,



Jessica Feierman

#### **ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORT**

ACLU of Nevada  
Burns Institute for Juvenile Justice, Fairness and Equity  
Campaign for Youth Justice  
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth  
Center for Children's Law and Policy  
Charles Boyer, Pastor, Bethel AME Church  
Coalition for Juvenile Justice  
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
Futures Without Violence  
Justice For Families  
Justice Policy Institute  
Juvenile Justice Initiative of Illinois  
Juvenile Law Center  
Kansas Appleseed  
Louisiana Center for Children's Rights  
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Juvenile Justice Network  
The Sentencing Project  
TeamChild  
Utah Juvenile Defender Resource Center  
Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform  
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families  
Wyoming Children's Law Center  
Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project