

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Katy Otto, Juvenile Law Center, 215-625-0551 x 128 or kotto@jlc.org

In the wake of Glen Mills, Juvenile Law Center releases report outlining strategies for reforming Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system

The report, with implications for decarceration efforts nationwide, coincides with Council for Reform’s report to Governor Wolf

PHILADELPHIA, PA (November 1, 2019): Attorneys from Juvenile Law Center published [*Transforming Justice: Bringing Pennsylvania’s Young People Safely Home from Juvenile Justice Placements*](#), a new report offering findings and recommendations in the wake of the abusive and sometimes tragic treatment of youth at Glen Mills, Wordsworth, and other youth placements in Pennsylvania.

In addition to an overview of youth placements statewide, the report features new, detailed data on Philadelphia youth in the justice system from the Defender Association of Philadelphia. The report is being released the same day Governor Tom Wolf is scheduled to receive recommendations from The Council on Reform, a committee he convened by executive order to address the treatment of vulnerable populations in state care throughout the Commonwealth.

“Too many youth, and particularly youth of color, are incarcerated in Pennsylvania. We prepared this report to shine a light on past abuses of these youth and to offer strategies to move forward. We are grateful that the Governor has called for reforms to protect vulnerable populations. We urge the State to seize this opportunity to dramatically transform the way we treat young people in the juvenile justice system. Young people do best—and communities are safest—when we provide supports in their homes and communities, not harmful and traumatizing incarceration,” said Jessica Feirman, Senior Managing Director at Juvenile Law Center and one of the authors of the report.

The report maintains that one of the best ways to avoid abuse and mistreatment in juvenile facilities is to reduce the number of youth in placement, citing powerful reforms that have taken place in New York through the Close to Home initiative and in Lucas County, Ohio. The report notes that an unacceptably high number of incarcerated youth are confined for technical probation violations—over 60% of Philadelphia youth in placement on July 12, 2019 were placed for technical probation violations—which leads to the persistent overincarceration of youth statewide. Juvenile Law Center identifies several jurisdictions where transformative change has occurred, substantially reducing rates of incarceration with no reduction in community safety. Additionally, the report outlines the egregious racial disparities in

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system and the need for community reinvestment to ensure better outcomes for both young people and their communities.

“For all young people in Pennsylvania to realize their potential, even when they make mistakes and violate the law, the justice system has to respond more effectively, which requires dramatically less confinement and stronger community-centered responses,” said Steve Bishop, senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which funded the report. “We hope that this report sheds light on the inherent harm posed by any type of court-ordered removal of a young person from their home and community and starts a discussion about more effective strategies for working with youth who need our very best interventions. Winning strategies have to address racial and ethnic disparities, prioritize keeping young people in their home communities and provide resources to support stronger, healthier and safer communities.”

Last year, Juvenile Law Center's Juveniles for Justice a program of youth advocates with experience in the justice system, released a groundbreaking report outlining their abusive and traumatic experiences in placement entitled [*Broken Bridges: How Juvenile Placements Cut Off Youth from Communities and Successful Futures*](#). Today's report from Juvenile Law Center is inspired by that work, and offers policy solutions to address the crisis in the Commonwealth of youth facing abuse and harm in juvenile facilities. The young people in Juveniles for Justice raised these issues with Philadelphia's city council last year, which led to the convening of a city-wide taskforce on institutional placements for youth. Juvenile Law Center staff and youth advocates are calling for the same level of attention from the Commonwealth.

Other advocates join our call for action. Mike O'Bryan from The Village for Arts and Humanities has been an outspoken community advocate for young people who are ensnared in juvenile placement.

“This is our chance to make fundamental change,” said Mike O'Bryan, Director of Learning for the Village of Arts and Humanities. “For years, I've worked to create a sense of community and belonging among our city's youth and organizations that service them. I've seen firsthand that youth have, or desire, the knowledge to make change. Further, they overwhelmingly have the will to fight for that change. I've also seen adults struggle to listen to young people and honor their lived experiences. Now is the time to listen to the voices of the most impacted and implement true youth justice reform.”

Juvenile Law Center will share a press conference revealing the report findings via livestream today at 10:00 am EST. Tune in [here](#).

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.