

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **JUVENILE LAW CENTER RESPONDS TO SENTENCING OF “KIDS-FOR-CASH” JUDGE**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA (August 11, 2011)** – Today’s sentencing of former Luzerne County, Pennsylvania juvenile court judge Mark Ciavarella represents the end of an important chapter in one of America’s largest judicial corruption scandals. In sentencing Ciavarella to serve 28 years, United States District Court Judge Edwin M. Kosik, who presided over Ciavarella’s criminal trial, stated, "You've apologized to everyone except the very people whose rights the Supreme Court found that you violated." In urging a life sentence, U.S. Attorney Gordon Zubrod stated, "Mr. Ciavarella's argument was that he was not selling kids retail... That's correct, he was selling them wholesale!"

“Thousands of children and families had their civil rights violated and their faith in justice all but destroyed,” said Robert Schwartz, Juvenile Law Center’s Executive Director. “We hope that today’s actions will help restore their sense of fairness and trust in the rule of law.”

The Luzerne County judicial corruption probe has been cited as the most egregious violation of children’s rights in U.S. history, tainting over 4,000 cases, forever altering the lives of thousands of children and families. In early 2010, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned over 4,000 cases at the request of Juvenile Law Center, ordering all of the juveniles’ records expunged and their cases dismissed with prejudice.

Former judge Mark Ciavarella was convicted, following a jury trial, on twelve counts of the federal indictment, including violations of the federal RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) statute, conspiracy, mail fraud and tax fraud. The charges stemmed from over \$1 million in payments he was alleged to have received from developer Robert Mericle and Luzerne County attorney Robert Powell, the owner of two private, for-profit juvenile detention centers. Ciavarella’s alleged co-conspirators, former Luzerne County Judge Michael Conahan, Powell and Mericle, have all pled guilty to related charges and await sentencing.

“The 28-year sentence handed down by Judge Kosik affirms the seriousness of the crimes committed and the impact those crimes had on the victims and their community,” says Marsha Levick, Deputy Director and Chief Legal Counsel at Juvenile Law Center. “Mr. Ciavarella will now experience for himself the impact that incarceration – the loss of freedom, humiliation and shame - can have on individuals and families. So many children were sent away by Ciavarella for minor misconduct. Today’s sentence restores the balance in our justice system, imposing a severe punishment for severe criminal misconduct.”

“The children of this community felt prostituted – traded for profit,” said Hillary Transue, whose mother alerted Juvenile Law Center of the violations occurring in Luzerne County. “It violated our trust, and our parents’ trust in government. And we will never fully regain our faith in the justice system unless real reforms are passed to make sure this never happens again.”

More than a year after the recommendations of the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice were released, and more than two and a half years after the charges against Ciavarella were first announced in January 2009, not a single legislative reform has been enacted to prevent a recurrence of the scandal that

unfolded in Luzerne County. State Senators Stewart Greenleaf and Lisa Baker have actively pursued reform efforts, but action is needed by the full General Assembly.

Juvenile Law Center will continue to work closely with policymakers, lawmakers and other juvenile justice and court officials to make sure that what happened to the children and families of Luzerne County is never again repeated in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Remaining steps to justice for Luzerne County's families include the conclusion of federal civil rights cases against Ciavarella, Conahan and their co-conspirators and the criminal sentencing of the remaining defendants.

Juvenile Law Center is the oldest national, non-profit, public interest law firm to advance and protect the rights and well-being of children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Juvenile Law Center is also a resource for other legal advocacy groups across the nation. For a complete history of this case or to access related documents, visit [www.jlc.org](http://www.jlc.org).

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