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#### New Poll Shows New Jerseyans Want Rehabilitation, Not Incarceration, For Our Youth

April 10, 2017 -- A new poll released today by Youth Justice New Jersey shows that nearly 85 percent of people in New Jersey believe the youth justice system should focus more on prevention and rehabilitation, not incarceration and punishment. Youth First, a leading national advocacy organization working to bring an end to youth incarceration, commissioned the poll, which was conducted by GBA Strategies.

“There is no dispute that New Jersey’s youth prisons are a failed experiment—a moral, fiscal, social and racial justice, and public safety failure. These powerful poll numbers demonstrate that people in New Jersey recognize that we must invest our collective resources in a community-based system of care, not in youth prisons,” said Ryan P. Haygood, President and CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (the Institute). The Institute is the convening organization for Youth Justice New Jersey—a growing coalition of approximately 50 state-based organizations, advocates, parents, formerly-incarcerated youth, and faith leaders committed to transforming New Jersey’s juvenile justice system.

“The poll shows that New Jerseyans overwhelmingly support providing treatment that has been shown to work: access to age-appropriate, rehabilitative alternatives to youth prisons that include programming with intensive wrap-around services and trauma-informed care for our young people,” said Andrea McChristian, Associate Counsel at the

Institute and primary author of *Ain't I A Child: Bring Our Children Home*, a report on the extreme racial disparities in New Jersey's youth justice system.

While the number of confined youth in New Jersey's youth prisons has been reduced by half, extreme racial disparities pervade the system, as do exorbitant costs. Black youth, incredibly, comprise nearly 75% of those committed to state juvenile facilities even though Black and white youth commit offenses at about the same rate.

"Youth prisons are harmful to our young people," said Retha Onitiri, Youth Justice New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Campaign Manager. "We must move to a community-based system of care that will help support and empower youth to become whole, healthy, and productive community members."

Even as New Jersey's youth prisons operate at far less than capacity, it still costs approximately \$537.35 a day, or \$200,000 annually, to incarcerate one child in New Jersey. Community-based programs, however, have an average daily cost of just \$75 per day.

"Locking kids up in prison is not only ineffective justice policy, but terrible fiscal policy," said Jon Whiten, Vice President of New Jersey Policy Perspective, which is a member of the Youth Justice New Jersey coalition. "The taxpayer cost of incarcerating youth is off the charts. We are wasting millions of dollars on a system that doesn't work for New Jersey's children and communities."

While recidivism rates remain incredibly high for youth leaving youth prisons, community-based programs with comprehensive services lower recidivism rates at a fraction of the cost of operating youth prisons.

In New Jersey, of the approximately 652 juveniles released from juvenile correctional facilities in 2011, almost 85% had a new court filing/arrest within three years of release. By contrast, community-based programs—such as those operated by Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP), a national non-profit committed to providing community-based alternatives to out-of-home placement—have a trackable record of success in increasing public safety. Of a sample of 1,851 YAP cases between the ages of 14 and 17, over 87% of the sample was living in the community, and less than 5% was in secure placement, between six and twelve months after being discharged from YAP. In addition, youth with prior out-of-home placements were more likely to stay in their community, and less likely to be in a secure facility, six to twelve months following their discharge from YAP.

YAP is just one example of the programming that can be used to keep our young people out of youth prisons and in their communities.

“Youth prisons are notoriously dangerous, ineffective, and outdated—and there is a clear consensus that it’s time to change the system,” said Liz Ryan, President of Youth First. “We know that kids can be rehabilitated without being locked up, if given the opportunity. States across the nation should unify behind this growing movement to close youth prisons and focus on solutions that actually work.”

Cecilia Zalkind, President and CEO of Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), which is a member of Youth Justice New Jersey, echoed this sentiment: “Although youth should be held accountable for their actions, the goal of the juvenile justice system is to ensure that system-involved youth are equipped with the skills they need to stay out of trouble and mature into productive adults. Large youth prisons will not accomplish this goal.”

The survey of over 500 New Jersey adults also found that:

- 75 percent agree that counseling and education for youth in the system will *save* tax dollars in the long run
- 77 percent believe that counseling and education will help prevent youth from reoffending
- 77 percent want to require states to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system

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