

Youth Justice Coalition



SENSIBLE JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM IN 2017

We can all agree that Louisiana needs common-sense juvenile justice policies that work, keep us safe, and save the state money. The Louisiana Youth Justice Coalition proposes the following legislative agenda to safely hold children accountable and help them grow into productive adults.

ALLOW YOUTH A MEANINGFUL CHANCE AT REDEMPTION

- Scientific evidence tells us what parents already know: children are far more impulsive and less able to weigh consequences than adults, but are also uniquely capable of positive change. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that, because of these differences, kids are less deserving of the most serious punishment. As a result, they ruled life without parole sentences for children unconstitutional in all but the rarest cases.
- Louisiana should comply with the Supreme Court's ruling by giving all children the opportunity to have their sentences reviewed by the parole board after serving a significant sentence. This allows people to reenter society only if they can prove complete rehabilitation. It holds children accountable while still recognizing their capacity for redemption.

REPEAL MANDATORY SENTENCING FOR KIDS

- When children make mistakes, we entrust our judges to hold them accountable and decide how to best rehabilitate them. Mandatory minimum sentences for kids – often referred to as “Vitter sentences” – take these decisions out of the hands of judges and fail to make our communities safer.
- Louisiana should give discretion back to our judges by repealing mandatory minimum sentences for children tried in juvenile court.

IMPROVE JUVENILE EXPUNGEMENT LAWS

- Every child should have the opportunity to succeed. Yet juvenile court records create barriers to education, employment, military service, and housing long after a child has put the justice system behind them.
- Louisiana must follow national best practices in its juvenile expungement laws – those governing the permanent destruction of records – to give young people a fighting chance at achieving success in our difficult economic times.

CREATE SAFETY STANDARDS FOR YOUTH IN SECURE CARE FACILITIES

- Louisiana lacks statewide safety standards for state-run juvenile secure care facilities, even though it regulates conditions in locally run, temporary detention centers. This simply doesn't make sense. We would never send a child to a daycare that did not have clear safety codes.
- The legislature should pass a comprehensive bill that establishes standards for juvenile secure care facilities. These standards should include a ban on solitary confinement, which is psychologically ruinous to children and one of the greatest safety threats to youth in juvenile facilities.