



NATIONAL FOSTER YOUTH INSTITUTE

Campaign for National Youth Justice Action Month, 2021

1. Letter to Biden Administration
2. Social Media Campaign (*scroll down for instructions on how to participate*)

[Click here to add your name to the letter below.](#)

President Joseph R. Biden
C/O Director Cedric Richmond
White House Office of Public Engagement

Dear President Biden,

As formerly incarcerated youth, [your proclamation for National Youth Justice Action Month](#) is deeply personal to us. We are all young adults who were placed in the justice system when we were children. We also all have experience in the child welfare system. Unfortunately, that dual status experience is not unique. A University of Chicago study found that by 17, more than half of youth in foster care had experienced an arrest, a conviction, or spent time in a correctional facility. The foster care-to-prison pipeline exists and its impact is devastating.

Your proclamation gives us great hope that the goals you laid out may come to fruition and disrupt that pipeline. However, in our experience, even the best of intentions do not become reality without accountability and input from those with lived experience. In order to do our part in ensuring that our country is a place of justice, hope, and the opportunity to fulfill your dreams no matter where you start out in life, we offer the following suggestions based on our personal experience:

- Setting aside federal funding for mentorship programs with people with lived experience in the incarceration system and investments in community programs and nonprofits that provide direct and preventative services.
- Funding and Medicaid coverage for mental health services, including alternative therapies that go beyond one-on-one therapy sessions.
- Comprehensive programs to assist and support youth who are transitioning out of incarceration facilities.
- Directing the Department of Justice to oversee a program that ensures youth are provided with legal counsel who are trained specifically to advocate for children and young adults. Too many youth are being advised to take plea deals without a full understanding of the long-term consequences of their decision.
- Investments in proven diversion programs that treat mental health and addiction issues.

- A data-driven plan for reducing the number of youth who are incarcerated that includes training for law enforcement, first responders, social workers, attorneys, and judges. This includes education around appropriate and fair responses to support justice system-involved youth and at-risk youth. Too often, young people who have been deemed at-risk, who are involved in the child welfare system, or who are Black and Brown are punished too harshly for “acting out,” minor misbehaviors, or behaving like normal children.

We would like to invite White House and Department of Justice staffers to sit down with us, hear about our experiences in juvenile justice, and collaborate on the ideas we all have to make your vision a reality.

Collectively, we have lost thousands of days of our lives. That’s time that wasn’t spent in school, at work, or developing relationships that could have been a lifeline for us. We were punished and confined when what we really needed was support, understanding, and mentorship.

Our juvenile justice system is failing children, families, and communities. Often, it is ending lives before they even have a chance to begin. Your current proposed federal budget recognizes that human infrastructure plays a critical role in our nation. We encourage you to see and invest in the potential of justice system-involved young people.

For your entire career, Mr. President, you have been known for being both compassionate and collaborative. We’d be grateful to take advantage of that and work with your administration on identifying opportunities to implement your juvenile justice reform goals in communities across the country.

Sincerely,

Juvenile Justice Think Tank at the National Foster Youth Institute

#LostDays Social Media Campaign

Nationwide, children in the foster care system are being disproportionately and harshly punished for minor misbehaviors and normal boundary-pushing behavior. Too many days, months, and years are lost because of unnecessary and traumatic encounters with the juvenile justice system. To wrap up National Youth Justice Action Month, we are shining a light on the lost days that youth nationwide experience. If you have experience in the juvenile justice system and want to raise awareness to create change, join our online campaign.

To participate:

- grab a piece of paper and write down the number of days you were incarcerated and the incident that led to it. Ex: “I spent 5 days in the Juvenile Justice System for skipping school” or “I spent 20 days incarcerated for arguing with my sister in a group home.”
- Take a selfie with your piece of paper and post it to social media. Tag @nfyinstitute and use the hashtags #LostDays and/or #JJVoices.

- If you're not comfortable participating publicly but still want to help, take a photo of just your sign. You can also email pictures to mariah.craven@nfyi.org.

At the end of the month, we'll share the total number of days that youth around the country have lost to a biased and unsafe juvenile justice system and suggestions from our Juvenile Justice Think Tank for reform.