



For Immediate Release

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As advocates for youth in the youth justice system, we are disturbed to see the Governor and legislature propose increasing youth incarceration as a response to the tragedy at The Covenant School, a tragedy that had nothing to do with the youth justice system. According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), *youth crime in Tennessee has decreased by over 50% since 2013*; it defies logic to respond to a dramatic *decrease* in youth crime by transferring more 16-year-olds to dangerous adult prisons and jails where they will be denied education and mental health care and be at increased risk of abuse. Compared with those held in juvenile detention centers, *youth held in adult jails are five times more likely to be victims of attempted sexual attacks or rape, eight times more likely to commit suicide, twice as likely to be beaten by staff, and 50% more likely to be attacked with a weapon.*

The national estimate shows that around *70% of youth embroiled in the juvenile justice system have a disability and/or mental health diagnosis*. Research has also repeatedly shown that transferring youth to the adult criminal justice system makes them *more*, not less, likely to commit crimes in the future. In fact, almost *90% of youth in custody of the Department of Children's Services (DCS) on the juvenile justice side have had prior contact with DCS on the child welfare side*, making juvenile court judges more familiar with, and thus better situated to assess, this population of youth. In recognition of this fact, both Democratic and Republican-run states have worked to decrease transfer to adult courts over the past 20 years, over which period the rates of youth crime in the United States have continued to drop. **Using the special session to criminalize young people, rather than expand services, is deeply problematic, especially given that youth have been at the forefront of calling for meaningful solutions to school shootings.**

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Spokespeople from both organizations are available for comment.

For more information and for comment, contact:

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Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) is the designated Protection & Advocacy (P&A) agency for Tennessee. DRT provides free legal advocacy services to protect the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities, and has broad access authority to monitor facilities, including juvenile justice facilities, and to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect. Visit www.DisabilityRightsTN.org for more information.



The Youth Law Center is a non-profit law firm that advocates to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation so that every child and youth can thrive. For over 40 years, Youth Law Center has pursued policy and advocacy to protect the rights of youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and to promote positive youth connections to community and family. The Youth Law Center is headquartered in San Francisco, California, with staff in Tennessee. Visit www.YLC.org for more information.