



For Immediate Release:
Oct. 14, 2010

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Children's Advocacy Groups Merge Efforts to Create Ohio Juvenile Justice Alliance

COLUMBUS, OHIO—Voices for Ohio's Children and the Children's Defense Fund – Ohio today announced the formation of the Ohio Juvenile Justice Alliance (OJJA), which will merge the groups' separate efforts into one alliance dedicated to juvenile justice issues.

"We are pleased to be working with the Children's Defense Fund – Ohio on the new Ohio Juvenile Justice Alliance," said Amy Swanson, executive director of Voices for Ohio's Children. "More than 60 percent of the youth in the Department of Youth Services' facilities are not in the system for violent offenses, so it's clear that reform is needed in Ohio. By combining our two efforts, we will be better able to advocate for change to help Ohio's youth."

Voices for Ohio's Children previously managed the Ohio Juvenile Justice Initiative, but decided to merge efforts with the Children's Defense Fund – Ohio because of the distinct similarities of the two efforts and the potential to further their mission by working with another statewide group. The OJJA will continue the former Juvenile Justice Initiative's work to:

- Create an agenda for reform in Ohio that provides a comprehensive vision, from prevention through re-entry, and incorporates best practices and policies for children;
- Educate, convene and mobilize a partnership for a reform agenda among families and youth, service providers, advocates, policy-makers, citizens and other stakeholders;
- Prepare and disseminate educational materials, white papers, policy briefings, and educational materials issues;
- Educate and inform policy makers about legislative reform priorities that achieve targeted public policy reforms consistent with a reform agenda;
- Monitor legislation and advocate for change, where appropriate; and
- Advocate for prioritized systemic change through civic engagement, media outreach and legislative reform.

"The joining of the efforts of the Children's Defense Fund – Ohio and Voices for Ohio's Children to bring together the Ohio Juvenile Justice Alliance will result in better outcomes for youth who enter the juvenile justice system," said Ronald R. Browder, executive director of Children's Defense Fund – Ohio. "This is a major step towards breaking the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® cycle."

Swanson and Browder will serve as initial conveners of this work, and will devote their staff's support for the work of the OJJA.

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The announcement coincided with a special *Kids Talk* series discussion held by Voices for Ohio's Children. The monthly policy briefings are held to inform and educate policy makers and staff on the issues that impact the safety and well being of Ohio's children and their families. Today's *Kids Talk* event focused on juvenile justice reform in Ohio.

Dr. Edward J. Latessa, professor and director of the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati, and Chris Money, interim director, Ohio Department of Youth Services, were among the speakers providing a status report on juvenile justice issues in Ohio.

The OJJA held its first meeting today and plans to hold monthly meetings going forward.

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Voices for Ohio's Children is the non-partisan voice of Ohio's nearly 3 million children. With more than 100 collaborative partners, we impact the changes in public policy that improve the health, safety, education, family stability and childcare of Ohio's children and their families. Learn more at www.vfc-oh.org.

CDF-Ohio is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan research and advocacy organization. We provide a strong and effective voice for the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. As an independent voice for children, CDF does not accept government funds.

Particular attention is given to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. Our goal is to educate the state about the needs of children and encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family break down. Please visit the web site at www.childrensdefense.org/ohio for more information.