JOB DESCRIPTION:
Special Counsel, Campaign to End Juvenile Life Without Parole

The Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights seeks an experienced attorney to lead our campaign to ensure that Louisiana children are not sentenced to serve life in prison without the opportunity for parole.

The Special Counsel will develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy to protect and expand the rights of people facing juvenile life without parole sentences in Louisiana. The Special Counsel will implement that strategy through targeted legal issue litigation; provision of case consultation, training, and practice resources for public defenders across Louisiana who are appointed in cases implicating juvenile life without parole; coordinating pro bono counsel for inmates seeking relief under the Miller v. Alabama decision; and coalition-building and stakeholder education for law change to eliminate the possibility of life without parole sentences for children.

This is an opportunity for a highly-skilled lawyer to play a leadership role in justice reform through both litigation and policy reform advocacy. Strong candidates will have excellent strategic judgment; exceptional litigation, planning, and project-management skills; deep substantive knowledge of relevant jurisprudence and social science; a demonstrated commitment to justice reform and the defense of children; and the ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences.

Organizational Overview

The Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights is a nonprofit law center that defends the right of every child in Louisiana’s juvenile justice system to fairness, dignity, and opportunity.

We are policy analysts, law reform advocates, and community partners who design and build the supports and opportunities – from safe schools to strong service provider networks – that young people need to thrive in their own homes and communities.

When children fall into the juvenile justice system, we are their champions – their lawyers, social workers, investigators, education advocates, and case managers. Our Children’s Defense Team – the juvenile public defender in New Orleans and one of the foremost juvenile defenders in the country – uses an innovative model of holistic, team-based, cross-disciplinary advocacy to win both legal and life success for vulnerable youth in nearly 1,000 cases each year.

Our policy reform and impact litigation arm is the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL), with 17 years of experience fighting for a juvenile justice system that is fair, compassionate, and supportive of positive youth development.

The Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights values diversity and is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Women, people of color, LGBT persons, and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply.
Project Overview: Juvenile Life Without Parole in Louisiana

Over 300 men and women are serving life sentences in Louisiana’s prisons for offenses committed before they turned 18 – the nation’s highest per capita rate of juvenile life without parole sentences. And every year, dozens of Louisiana children are arrested and charged as adults for offenses carrying the possibility of life without parole.

In 2012, the United States Supreme Court handed down Miller v. Alabama, which held that mandatory life without parole sentences for children under the age of 18 violate the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. Miller required that courts conduct individualized sentencing hearings that take into account the child’s individual character, life circumstances, and other mitigating factors.

Unfortunately, Louisiana is one of a minority of jurisdictions nationally that have denied retroactive relief to inmates whose convictions were finalized at the time Miller was decided. The Supreme Court’s decision on Miller retroactivity in Montgomery v. Louisiana, expected in the spring of 2016, will therefore hit home in Louisiana with unusual force – and will open the floodgates to litigation for hundreds of eager inmates who have been forced to wait for relief.

Position Responsibilities

The Special Counsel is an experienced attorney whose primary responsibility is leading LCCR’s campaign to ensure that Louisiana youth do not serve life sentences in prison without the opportunity for parole.

The Special Counsel will develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy to protect and expand the rights of people facing juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) sentences in Louisiana. The Special Counsel will implement that strategy through targeted legal issue litigation; provision of case consultation, training, and practice resources for public defenders across Louisiana who are appointed in JLWOP cases; coordinating pro bono counsel for inmates seeking relief under Miller; and coalition-building and stakeholder education for policy change to eliminate the possibility of JLWOP sentences.

The Special Counsel’s specific responsibilities include:

Develop and Implement Legal Advocacy Strategies

- Take the lead in developing a statewide litigation strategy to protect and expand the rights of people facing juvenile life without parole sentences – both at the trial phase and retroactively – in Louisiana;
- Implement the litigation strategy through tactics including direct representation in a limited docket of JLWOP cases, and co-counseling and providing consultation services for public defenders statewide;
- Develop and provide practice resources, including training opportunities, for Louisiana lawyers who represent youth in JLWOP cases;
- Coordinate with organizations working with inmates serving juvenile life without parole, and with their families, to ensure that regular and accurate legal advice is given to people who may benefit from the Montgomery decision and its aftermath;
- Recruit and connect pro bono counsel with appropriate clients who cases implicate key issues in juvenile life without parole cases.
Policy Advocacy and Campaign Coordination
- Develop a campaign strategy to achieve the policy goal of eliminating JLWOP sentences in Louisiana;
- Build and maintain a coalition of allies in support of the project’s policy goal;
- Design and implement a communications strategy, including developing any necessary communications materials, to support campaign goals;
- Lead legislative outreach and education efforts to achieve reform.

Other Administrative and Program Responsibilities
- Represent LCCR in community forums, in partnerships with other stakeholders, in meetings with donors and supporters, and in other capacities at the discretion of the Executive Director;
- Prioritize responsibilities and use resources effectively and efficiently;
- Thoroughly document advocacy efforts and outcomes;
- Carefully keep electronic and paper records, case files, calendars, activity logs, case lists, and timesheets, and perform other administrative tasks as directed;
- Supervise law clerks, interns, AmeriCorps members, as appropriate;
- Collaborate with other LCCR staff in strategic planning and implementation, and in realizing the office’s mission and vision through refinement of existing projects and new project development;
- Assist in project evaluation and assessment;
- Other projects as directed by LCCR’s Executive Director.

All LCCR staff must perform all duties in accordance with applicable law, ethical rules, and the performance standards promulgated by LCCR and by the Louisiana Public Defender Board.

Reporting Relationships

The Special Counsel reports to the Executive Director of LCCR. The Special Counsel may work under the aegis of either LCCR or its systemic reform arm, JJPL.

Required Qualifications

- At least three years of defense practice, including extensive legal issue litigation experience;
- Deep and demonstrated commitment to the people whom LCCR serves and to the transformation of the juvenile justice system into one that is fair, compassionate, and supportive of positive youth development;
- Expert knowledge of substantive and procedural criminal law, juvenile law, and trial practice skills, and facility with civil litigation rules and techniques;
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to write persuasively and clearly, the ability to communicate effectively with diverse populations, and the ability to build strong partnerships and coalitions;
- Long-term strategic vision, and creativity and flexibility in solving problems and meeting challenges;
- Strong work ethic and willingness to work late hours and/or weekends when circumstances demand it;
- A J.D. with current good standing to practice law in Louisiana, or eligibility for admission to the practice of law in Louisiana achieved within a reasonable time after hire;

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• Daily use of a car, with a valid driver’s license and insurance, and the ability to travel regularly throughout Louisiana.

Preferred Qualifications

• Familiarity with the geography, history, and people of New Orleans and Louisiana;
• Expertise in special education law, adolescent psychology, and other areas of knowledge important for effective advocacy on behalf of youth in the juvenile justice system;
• Experience with legislative advocacy, law reform initiatives and campaigns, and/or impact litigation.

Salary and Compensation

The salary for this position is commensurate with experience and competitive in the field of public interest law. Vacation, parental leave, and health benefits are provided. The position is full-time, and no other compensated work is permitted.

Application Instructions

Applicants must submit: (1) a cover letter; (2) a resume or C.V., including an e-mail address and daytime and evening telephone numbers; and (3) a list of three professional references, including the name, address, telephone number and, if available, e-mail address of each.

Please review the position qualifications carefully before applying. Applications that do not meet all required qualifications will not be reviewed or receive a response.

Please do not call with inquiries. All submissions must be made via email to jobs@lacr.org. Please place “Special Counsel” in the subject line of emailed submissions.

The position will remain open until September 18, 2015.