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Community Advocates Deliver Petition Demanding City Council End Practice of Holding Children in Orleans Parish Prison

New Orleans, LA – The Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights (LCCR) and other community advocates today delivered a petition with more than 1,700 signatures to City Councilmembers Susan Guidry and Jason Williams. The petition called on New Orleans City Council to end the practice of holding children under 18 at the Orleans Parish Prison, and instead keep them at the age-appropriate Youth Study Center (YSC).

“Housing children under 18 in an adult facility not only costs taxpayers more money, it also produces poorer outcomes for young people,” said Joshua Perry, executive director of the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights. “We urge City Council and Mayor Landrieu to do right by our children and allocate the funds required to move them to the Youth Study Center, where they will receive the support they need to get back on track.”

The Mayor’s Office has proposed a plan to relocate youth being held at OPP to a new 24-bed unit at YSC, where they can receive more developmentally appropriate services. Mayor Landrieu has proposed using federal disaster aid to fund this $7 million project, but those dollars are tied up in the ongoing battle between the Mayor and Sheriff Marlin Gusman. LCCR and other advocates are calling on City Council to ensure the YSC expansion is funded, regardless of whether FEMA funds are available – even if that means demanding Mayor Landrieu find the necessary funds in the capital budget before its adoption on November 21.

“I happily accept and sign this petition because our kids and our city deserve better,” said Councilmember Susan Guidry. “I will bring this to my fellow councilmembers and the Mayor and tell them: This is the will of the people.”

In a budget hearing following the press conference, all seven councilmembers signed on to the petition.

The negative consequences associated with holding children in OPP rather than YSC were highlighted in a new report released by LCCR last month. The report noted that children housed in adult facilities face higher risk of sexual and violent assault and are 36 times more likely to commit suicide. According to the report, moving youth to YSC would help to increase public safety while better equipping kids with the tools and supports they need in order to succeed.
A mother whose child was housed at both OPP and YSC spoke to these issues at the press conference.

“The moment my son set foot in [OPP], mental health treatment and education both stopped completely,” said Shana. “Kids’ lives are in danger at OPP. I am asking the leaders of this city to end this now, and make sure that no children ever have to go through what my son went through.”

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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 couple direct services with systems reform advocacy to create a smaller, safer, fairer juvenile justice system.