2018 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

In recent years, our state legislators have supported policies that help give children in the justice system real opportunities for success. But now that progress is under threat from those who wish to delay or undo it. That’s why our priority in 2018 is ensuring that Louisiana both keeps its old promises and finds new ways to nurture healthy kids and safe communities.

PROTECT THE RAISE THE AGE ACT

- In 2016, the Louisiana legislature overwhelmingly approved the Raise the Age Act to include 17-year-olds in the juvenile rather than adult justice system. This long overdue change is set to take partial effect in July, but legislation has been filed to delay its implementation.

- Kids can’t wait any longer. Children in adult prisons and jails are at great risk of physical abuse, sexual assault, and suicide. They are also more likely to reoffend than children who remain in the juvenile system, which puts our communities in danger and costs the state millions in future incarceration costs. The Coalition is committed to raising the age in 2018.

GUARANTEE HEARINGS FOR INCARCERATED YOUTH

- A 2016 bill established hearings for some incarcerated children at which a judge determines if they are rehabilitated and ready to return home. Since few eligible children have received their hearings since the law took effect, the Coalition is seeking to strengthen the statute.

END MANDATORY SENTENCING FOR KIDS

- For some serious offenses, children are required to serve long sentences in juvenile prison, often until their 21st birthdays. Judges are not allowed to modify so-called “Vitter sentences,” even if they determine that a young person is fully rehabilitated and ready to come home under supervision.

- Unnecessarily long periods of incarceration have no positive effect on reoffending and cost the state millions each year. Young people who are released at 21 are no longer eligible for services and supervision that children on parole receive. The Coalition supports legislation that allows judges to modify Vitter sentences if warranted, as they can in all other cases.

BAN THE INDISCRIMINATE SHACKLING OF KIDS IN COURT

- In much of the state, children as young as 10 are automatically shackled in court, even if they don’t present a danger or flight risk. Such a practice stigmatizes children who have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and can be a deeply traumatizing experience.

- The Coalition supports the Louisiana Law Institute’s recommendation to ban indiscriminate shackling, ensuring that the use of restraints is the exception rather than the norm in juvenile court.

For more information, visit www.youthjustice.la