



## JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM ACT

### BACKGROUND

Helping children reject a life of crime has long been a national priority. It requires more than an adjudication system and a detention facility. It requires a collaborative effort among parents, teachers, and community members to prevent criminal behavior and support children who have engaged in illegal activity.

To promote safe communities and help state and local leaders serve at-risk youth, Congress passed the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act* in 1974. The law coordinates federal efforts aimed at improving state juvenile justice systems with a focus on education and rehabilitation. Over the years, these state juvenile justice programs have helped children develop the life skills they need to hold themselves accountable and achieve success. However, not all juvenile justice programs have produced the same results, and the consequences can be devastating for vulnerable youth and local communities. In fact:

- More than 1 million children are currently involved in the juvenile justice system, and many more youth are at risk of entering the system because of difficult circumstances, such as poverty, broken families, and homelessness.
- Youth who have been incarcerated are 26 percent less likely to graduate from high school.
- Children who have been incarcerated are up to 26 percent more likely to engage in other unlawful activity and return to jail as adults.

The stats are alarming and Congress should do everything it can to help state and local leaders better serve at-risk youth and juvenile offenders. However, the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act* has not been reformed in nearly two decades. It's time for Congress to update the law and ensure state and local leaders have the tools they need to develop effective juvenile justice programs.

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To reauthorize and improve current law and put more kids on the pathway to success, Rep. Jason Lewis (R-MN) and Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA) introduced the *Juvenile Justice Reform Act (H.R. 1809)*. The bipartisan legislation helps set kids up for long-term success by:

- ✓ **Providing state and local leaders greater flexibility** to meet the needs of delinquent youth in their communities and improve public safety;
- ✓ **Helping at-risk youth** avoid the juvenile justice system by improving support for prevention services;
- ✓ **Prioritizing what works** and focusing on evidence-based strategies with proven track records; and
- ✓ **Improving accountability and oversight** to deliver positive outcomes for kids and protect taxpayers.