



For Immediate Release
October 19, 2009

Contact: Roy Miller, Children's Campaign, Inc., 727.224.7274, roywmiller@aol.com
Dr. Lawanda Ravoira, Center for Girls, 904.237.8666, lravoira@aol.com

Advocates Seek Federal Involvement in Justice for Girls

(Jacksonville, FL.) -- Dr. Lawanda Ravoira, state and national expert on girls in the juvenile justice system, will provide testimony to the Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security Subcommittee of the United States House Judiciary Committee, on Tuesday, October 20th, in Washington D.C. The subcommittee hearing will be the first of its kind in addressing what has become the fastest growing trend in criminal justice – the involvement and incarceration of girls in juvenile justice systems across the country.

Ravoira heads up the Jacksonville based Center for Girls and Young Women, affiliated with the National Council on Crime & Delinquency, and is the lead organizer of the *Justice for Girls: Duval County Initiative*, affiliated with Children's Campaign, Inc., a Florida child advocacy and watchdog group.

The hearing comes at a time when advocates believe that girls at risk of juvenile justice involvement continue to be a low priority for services and programs despite research that underscores the complexity of their needs. Ravoira said, "The juvenile justice system has historically failed to meet the needs of girls which has led to tragic outcomes for far too many of them."

Most juvenile justice programs have been designed for boys, and girls have struggled for equitable treatment. "Because of the failure to get it right, girls are further traumatized and victimized in the very systems of care that should be providing the services to turn their lives around," said Ravoira.

The Center for Girls and Young Women and the Children's Campaign have encouraged federal lawmakers to hold this hearing. Advocates who are bringing the girls' issue forward at the Florida state capitol in Tallahassee believe that far reaching systemic reform will be aided by Congressional attention and oversight.

"We must strike the right balance," said Roy Miller, founder and president of the Children's Campaign. "We are calling for the equitable allocation of resources so that girls can be held accountable while we address the abuse and victimization underlying many of their actions and poor decisions."

- more -

Advocates Seek Justice for Girls – page two

Advocates press that criminal justice systems have consistently missed the mark - and as a result there is an epidemic of programs that are ill conceived and ill equipped to address the needs. Young girls who could be helped in their local communities end up in lock-up facilities far removed from their families and support networks. Advocates contend these programs sometimes do more harm than good.

Crime rates are decreasing nationally for both girls and boys, but the rate of decrease has been slower for girls. Girls now make up 29% of the 1.2 million arrests nationally (UCR). Girls represent 15% of the incarcerated population and as much as 34% in some states. In Florida, the rate of incarceration of girls has climbed 33% over the past 10 years.

Girls also enter the system at younger ages than boys. Of all youth incarcerations nationally, 42% of girls are 15 and younger compared to 31% of boys 15 and younger. The types of offenses that lead to the incarceration of girls are less serious than boys.

“Mental health, physical health, domestic violence, and victimization issues must be addressed if we are truly going to serve girls appropriately and equitably,” said Ravoira.

The *Justice for Girls: Duval County Initiative* was begun with funding from the Women’s Giving Alliance, an initiative of the Community Foundation in Jacksonville in conjunction with the foundation and the Jesse Ball duPont Fund.

Barbara Harrell, President of the Women’s Giving Alliance, said, “Our members have been deeply moved by this advocacy work. We welcome the opportunity to call attention on the national level to the possibility of better outcomes for our girls – and for our communities.”

- 30 -

For more information, visit:
Center for Girls and Young Women, www.justiceforallgirls.org
Children’s Campaign, Inc., www.iamforkids.org