

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 22, 2017

CONTACT: Ianthe Metzger | Ianthe.Metzger@berlinrosen.com | 202-903-4868

Advocates Officially Launch Youth Justice Milwaukee, a Campaign to Close Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake Youth Prisons

MILWAUKEE – A coalition of community organizations, youth advocates and family members of youth involved in the juvenile justice system today officially launched Youth Justice Milwaukee (YJM), a broad-based alliance leading the fight to close Wisconsin's dangerous and outdated youth prisons. YJM hopes to replace the prisons with community-based, family-centered, restorative programs that are proven to work better and cost taxpayers less money.

Overwhelming evidence shows that [youth prisons are harmful](#), ineffective and excessively expensive, and a vast majority of Milwaukeeans agree. [New poll data released today](#) confirms that two-thirds of adults in Milwaukee County -- of all political stripes -- support shifting the focus of the juvenile justice system from incarceration to prevention and rehabilitation. YJM's coalition of advocates will fight to translate this public support into expanded [alternative treatment options](#) in Milwaukee County that give youth the opportunity to repair harm to victims and communities, such as intensive rehabilitation, education, job training, and community service.

"Our current system relies too heavily on locking up our youth, which seriously damages their chances at recovery and future success," **said Youth Justice Milwaukee's Sharlen Moore**. "Far too often, young people leave Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake worse off than when they came in. There are better approaches, and we are dedicated to making alternatives available here in Milwaukee County and across the state so our young people, families, and communities have the chance to recover and thrive."

Youth in prison are routinely subjected to maltreatment which can exacerbate trauma, limit learning and lead to future recidivism. The rampant abuses at Lincoln Hills School for Boys and Cooper Lake School for Girls have been [widely documented](#), as they remain under investigation by the FBI. In recent months, allegations of sexual assault, use of pepper spray, strangulation and suffocation of youth, as well as destruction of public records, have renewed calls for the closure of these outdated, inhumane facilities. Earlier this year, the ACLU of Wisconsin and the Juvenile Law Center sued state officials on behalf of four teenagers, for cruel and unusual punishment at these facilities.

"There is mounting evidence that our youth justice system must be reformed," **added Youth Justice Milwaukee's Jeff Roman**. "However, the proposal to build a new youth prison in Milwaukee County is a huge step backward because it doubles down on a failed system and would be a waste of taxpayer dollars. That's why we're committed to community-based solutions that work better while saving money."

The new poll confirms widespread public support for alternative approaches that keep youth out of prison, finding that:

- 90% support designing treatment and rehabilitation plans that include a youth's family in planning and services.
- 83% support providing financial incentives for states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration, such as intensive rehabilitation, education, job training, community services, and programs that provide youth the opportunity to repair harm to victims and communities.
- 73% support requiring states to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system.
- 69% support increased funding to provide more public defenders who represent children in court.

The full poll results are available [here](#). Prior to their official launch, YJM also released a list of recommendations for transforming Milwaukee's broken juvenile justice system which can be found [here](#).

###

Youth Justice Milwaukee is a broad-based campaign advocating for community-based, family-centered, restorative programs as an alternative to locking up children in Wisconsin's youth prisons. Youth Justice Milwaukee represents a coalition of persons who were incarcerated as youth, families of youth who are or were incarcerated, service providers, and local and national youth justice advocates.