

Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove Introduces Landmark Youth Justice Reform Legislation

The Directly Impacted Child Rehab and Safety Act would align federal law with child rights standards enshrined in several international human rights treaties

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, April 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, April 29th, Congresswoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove introduced the Directly Impacted Child Rehab and Safety Act, federal legislation aimed at protecting children from some of the harshest features of the criminal legal system and advancing a more developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed approach to youth justice.



Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove speaks at HRFK Press Conference

The bill would modernize federal law by establishing a minimum age of twelve for criminal culpability, raising the minimum age to sixteen for a child to be prosecuted as an adult, requiring courts to consider childhood trauma during transfer proceedings, prohibiting the placement of youth in federal adult correctional facilities, eliminating the felony murder rule for children, supporting child-serving systems through a federal grant program, and requiring better federal data collection on youth in custody.

“Everyone deserves a second chance. But too often, the justice system prioritizes punishment over rehabilitation, disproportionately impacting Black and brown communities,” said Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove. “Too few incarcerated people get another opportunity, and those who do often reenter society without help getting back on their feet—leading some to end up back in the system. I’m proud to introduce this legislative package that would ensure that justice-involved individuals both receive second chances and have the resources they need to succeed.”

Human Rights for Kids (HRFK) welcomed the bill’s introduction as part of a broader national

movement to end policies that expose children to violence, deepen trauma, undermine rehabilitation, and flout international human rights law. The U.S. is the only country in the world that has not ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child which prohibits the practice of treating children like adults when they commit offenses.

According to research conducted by HRFK, more than 80% of children prosecuted as adults in the United States are held in adult jails and prisons while under the age of eighteen. Nearly half of them (46%), experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at the hands of older adult prisoners.

“Federal law should not allow young children to be funneled into punitive systems that ignore their age, trauma, and capacity for change,” said Teresa Kominos, Senior Policy Counsel at HRFK. “This legislation reflects what advocates, survivors, and researchers have long made clear: children need responses grounded in safety, accountability, and rehabilitation, not adult punishment. By raising the age, keeping youth out of adult facilities, and creating a more developmentally appropriate federal framework, this bill moves us closer to a justice system that recognizes the humanity and human rights of every child.”

The introduction comes as states across the country continue to move away from extreme practices that criminalize childhood and place youth in adult facilities. Human Rights for Kids has helped elevate these issues through policy advocacy, public education, and research documenting the deep trauma experienced by children prosecuted and incarcerated in adult systems.

“Across the nation we are seeing states pass laws to end the terrible practice of prosecuting elementary school-aged children in our justice system, as well as removing youth from adult correctional facilities at a historic pace,” said Jolene Forman, Chief Program & Advocacy Officer at The Just Trust. “These bipartisan reforms are about eliminating physical and sexual violence that happens to kids when they’re placed in adult jails and prisons, as well as recognizing that children under 12 years of age do not and cannot form criminal intent. We are excited to see the re-introduction of the Childhood Offenders Rehabilitation and Safety Act by Congresswoman Kamlager-Dove which is rooted in human rights and reflects the growing momentum to change the way the justice system treats some of our most vulnerable children.”

HRFK has long supported federal reforms that recognize children are different from adults and should never be subjected to the same punitive systems. The organization’s work has helped build momentum for legislation that protects children from adult incarceration, ensures age-appropriate legal treatment, and brings federal policy into closer alignment with human rights principles and policies enacted at the state level.

About Human Rights for Kids

Human Rights for Kids is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the human rights of children. Through research and education, coalition building, policy

advocacy, and strategic litigation, Human Rights for Kids works to end child rights abuses and advance laws and policies that protect children and promote rehabilitation, healing, and dignity.

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