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United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the students they serve, we urge you to vote YES on the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2017 (H.R. 1809), which is scheduled to come to the floor this week. Votes associated with this issue may be included in the NEA Legislative Report Card for the 115th Congress.

NEA appreciates that H.R. 1809 strengthens and updates the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), which sets national standards for the custody and care of youth in the juvenile justice system and provides direction and support for state juvenile justice system improvements. Specifically, we welcome:

- **Emphasizing evidence-based strategies to reduce disparities in detention rates.** H.R. 1809 directs states and localities to plan and implement data-driven approaches to ensuring fairness and reducing disparities in detention rates among racial and ethnic groups, including measurable objectives and publicly reported results. Today, at all levels of the juvenile justice system, youth of color are disproportionately over-represented and subjected to more punitive sanctions than similarly-charged or situated white youth. While we appreciate the clear direction to states and localities to plan and implement data-driven approaches, we believe the goal should be to end disparities and that the measurable objectives should support that goal.
- **Strengthening the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO) core protection.** By 2020, H.R. 1809 phases out the violation of court order (VCO) exception—no longer allowed under federal law, but still permitted in some states. Under the VCO exception, youth may be detained for status offenses like truancy and running away from home. Research shows that this approach is harmful to youth development; it can also be costly, especially when compared to community-based alternatives.
- **Improving jail removal and sight-and-sound core protections.** H.R. 1809 requires youth awaiting trials in criminal courts to be kept out of adult lock-ups or sight-and-sound separation in the limited circumstances where they may be detained in adult facilities. Research shows that youth who are held in adult jails and lock-ups are more likely to become repeat offenders and commit suicide.

- **Reaffirming a national commitment to rehabilitation and developmentally appropriate practices, including treating as many youths as possible in their communities.** Driven by research-based understandings of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, H.R. 1809 would:
  - Allow for easier transfer of education credits for system-involved youth
  - Provide youth opportunity incentive grants to promote prevention and a comprehensive continuum of care
  - Increase family engagement in the design and delivery of treatment and services
  - Focus on the needs of specific populations—e.g., trafficked and tribal youth
  - Support state efforts to expand youth access to counsel and inform youth who get their lives back on track of opportunities to seal or expunge their juvenile records
- **Encouraging transparency, timeliness, public notice, and communication on the part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), its agents, and the states.** H.R. 1809 updates the requirements for the OJJDP’s annual report to Congress to increase accountability, enhance oversight of grant programs, and ensure state compliance with federal standards.

Overall, H.R. 1809 is a long-overdue and significant improvement over current law. We urge you to vote YES on this vitally important legislation when it comes to the floor.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations