

NATIONAL JUVENILE DEFENDER CENTER

EST 1997



“The child ‘requires the guiding hand of counsel at every step in the proceedings against him.’”

U.S. SUPREME COURT

IN RE GAULT, 387 U.S. 1, 12 (1967) (INTERNAL CITATION OMITTED)

NJDC

1 Mission and Vision

3 Our History

5 Our Work

7 Children's Defense Specialization

8 Youth Rights and Equity

9 Defender-Driven Advocacy

10 Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships

11 Get Involved

“I always come home inspired to be a better advocate and attorney. More things seem possible.”

— Attendee,
NJDC's Juvenile Defender
Leadership Summit



The National Juvenile Defender Center promotes justice for all children by ensuring excellence in juvenile defense

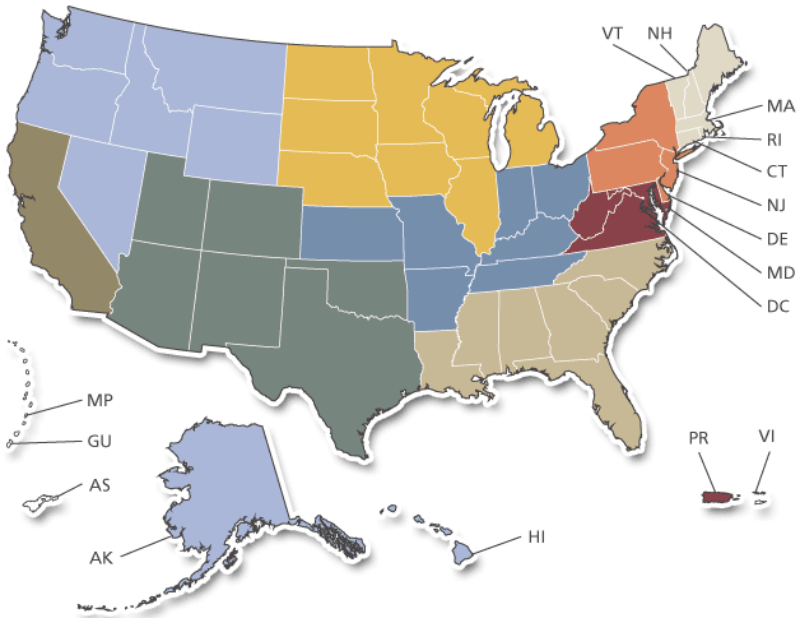
We believe:

- ALL CHILDREN** in the justice system must have ready and timely access to skilled, well-resourced, and trained defenders;
- ALL CHILDREN** must be afforded full protection of their constitutional, civil, and human rights;
- ALL CHILDREN** must receive legal representation that is client-centered, compassionate, developmentally and age-appropriate, and free of bias;
- ALL CHILDREN** must have the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, and the freedom to build a successful life for themselves and their families.

Regional Juvenile Defender Centers

Because juvenile justice systems are a patchwork in size and structure across the states and territories, NJDC created nine regional centers to stay continually engaged with frontline juvenile defenders and changing policies and practices.

NJDC staff in Washington, D.C., partner with the volunteer directors of the regional centers to prioritize projects, develop and strengthen juvenile defense communities and leaders, and share information. Together, the national and regional offices are powerful allies in ensuring children’s access to high-quality, specialized lawyers.



GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR LOCAL REGIONAL DIRECTORS BY VISITING NJDC.INFO/REGIONALCENTERS.

Established in 1997 in response to a crisis in juvenile courts

Twenty years ago, children across the country were routinely processed through the juvenile justice system without the protection of lawyers — a constitutional right guaranteed to youth by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967.

Beneath the weight of those words, “the right to counsel,” the Court recognized the unique contributions of the juvenile defender. And yet, decades after that landmark ruling, children continue to stand in court alone without the guidance of lawyers.

Heeding the Court’s declaration of rights, NJDC set out to build the capacity of the juvenile defense community to ensure every child not only has an attorney, but one who is specialized and trained in developmentally appropriate techniques, skills, and law specific to representing youth.

For two decades, NJDC has worked toward fulfilling the promise of counsel — and thus, the promise of justice, dignity, and a fair chance of a successful future — for every young person involved in the court system.

SINCE 1997, NJDC has been transforming children's defense representation:

ASSESSED

24
STATES

NJDC has evaluated juvenile defense systems in 24 states. Assessments provide state leaders, justice stakeholders, and the public with a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and deficits of children's defense and offer recommendations tailored to the state to ensure due process rights for youth are fulfilled.

AUTHORED

200+
RESOURCES

NJDC is committed to providing the juvenile defender community with the tools necessary to grow their legal, advocacy, and leadership skills. Through reports, issue briefs, policy statements, training curricula, and other publications, NJDC has developed a vast library of resources to improve the practice of lawyers representing young people.

TRAINED

5,000+
DEFENDERS

Every year, NJDC hosts the Juvenile Defender Leadership Summit, the only national gathering of its kind, to inspire and energize juvenile defenders from every state. NJDC also organizes Summer Academy, a weeklong intensive training program for new and experienced frontline defenders. Throughout the year, NJDC provides topic-specific trainings across the country.

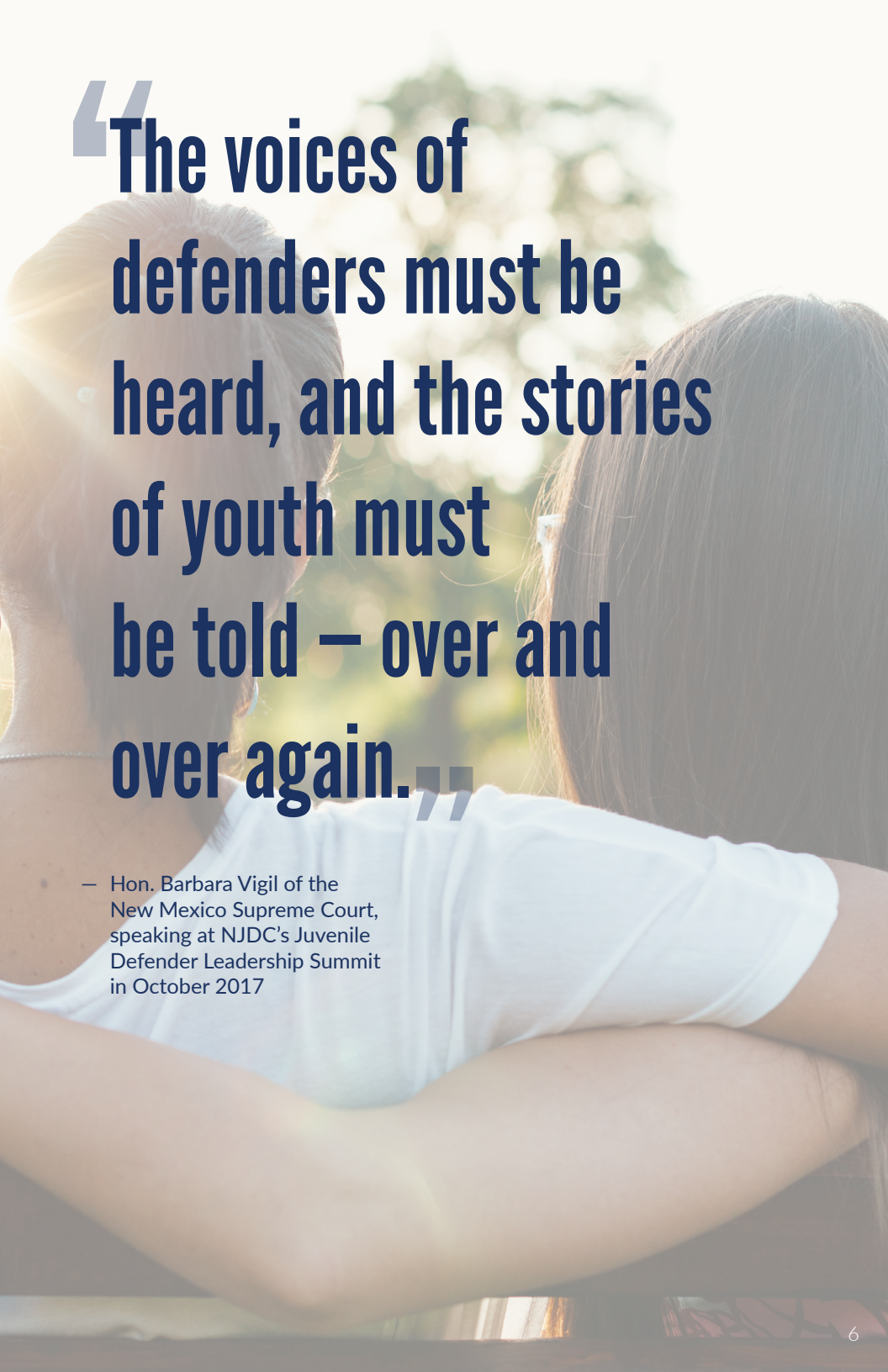
ADVANCED

100+
DEFENSE
IMPROVEMENTS

Through policy development, litigation support, training, and the assessment and evaluation of juvenile court systems, NJDC has been at the forefront of the movement to ensure young people have rights, representation, and a voice in juvenile court.

We're fulfilling the constitutional promise of counsel for youth through four primary strategies:

- CHILDREN'S DEFENSE SPECIALIZATION**
Cultivating a community of defenders who represent youth by growing expertise, leadership, and training opportunities
- YOUTH RIGHTS AND EQUITY**
Tearing down structural racism and confronting bias and unequal treatment of children in the court system
- DEFENDER-DRIVEN ADVOCACY**
Ensuring children's right to counsel is achieved in justice reform efforts from the local to the federal level
- YOUTH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**
Engaging youth and their circles of support to strengthen defenders and communities, while building bridges to common ground and collaboration



**“The voices of
defenders must be
heard, and the stories
of youth must
be told – over and
over again.”**

— Hon. Barbara Vigil of the
New Mexico Supreme Court,
speaking at NJDC’s Juvenile
Defender Leadership Summit
in October 2017

Children's Defense Specialization

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF DEFENDERS WHO REPRESENT YOUTH BY GROWING EXPERTISE, LEADERSHIP, AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Over two decades, the National Juvenile Defender Center has established a community of juvenile defenders who dedicate their legal practice to representing children in delinquency court.

In order to maintain and grow the community, NJDC organizes and delivers innovative trainings; responds to requests for assistance, whether long distance or on-the-ground support; and facilitates dialogue between juvenile defenders in urban, rural, remote, and tribal communities in every state and territory.

NJDC is continually sharing new strategies to raise the quality of

defense of youth nationwide — the baseline of which is laid out in the *National Juvenile Defense Standards*. These standards, developed by NJDC and the juvenile defender community, articulate the unique responsibilities and core commitments of attorneys who represent young people.

NJDC has worked in every state to document, challenge, and reform policies and practices that disrupt children's constitutional right to counsel. In partnership with defenders, NJDC identifies needs and gaps on the frontlines of court systems and develops strategies to strengthen juvenile defense and uphold children's legal protections.



JTIP: **JUVENILE TRAINING IMMERSION PROGRAM**

The only national training curriculum for juvenile defenders, the Juvenile Training Immersion Program (JTIP) is a highly specialized, comprehensive, 42-lesson trial advocacy training program structured to help defenders improve their practice skills. JTIP provides on-your-feet skills development and legal education to promote strong youth-attorney relationships and excellence in defense in every state.

Youth Rights and Equity

TEARING DOWN STRUCTURAL RACISM AND CONFRONTING BIAS AND UNEQUAL TREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE COURT SYSTEM

Over the past five decades, the legal community has witnessed both the growth of the juvenile defense field and the proliferation of laws and policies outlawing adolescence. Young people in the juvenile justice system, who are mostly poor, youth of color, rarely receive the benefit of a childhood in which mistakes are made and then learned from and remedied.

Moreover, the rights Americans hold dear — the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, the right to be free of unreasonable search and seizure, the right to remain silent, and even the right to counsel — have been too often denied to young people, and particularly young people of color and LGBTQ youth.

The National Juvenile Defender Center's Youth Rights and Equity work is two-pronged: confronting bias and unequal treatment against young people as they navigate the court system and making an intentional effort to diversify the ranks of juvenile defenders.

From the moment a young person makes contact with law enforcement or the court system, an attorney should be on the frontlines defending children's rights against bias and unbridled power. The future of the juvenile defense community lies in the intersection of our roles as defenders and civil rights lawyers. NJDC is bridging the fight for children's freedom and dignity in court with the civil rights movement.



Defender-Driven Advocacy

ENSURING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO COUNSEL IS ACHIEVED IN JUSTICE REFORM EFFORTS FROM THE LOCAL TO THE FEDERAL LEVEL

No child should ever stand in a courtroom without a lawyer at their side. But children's constitutional right to counsel — including access to counsel and quality of representation — is too often left behind in justice reform efforts.

The National Juvenile Defender Center is committed to helping state systems and lawyers do better for all youth, lifting up children's defense and due process protections through local, state, and federal advocacy campaigns.

The cornerstone of NJDC's work is strong relationships with frontline defenders and leadership across the country. NJDC conducts in-depth

analyses in states to measure the delivery of juvenile defense; develops thoughtful, comprehensive responses to improve advocacy and ensure the protection of children's rights; and leads nationwide initiatives to grow public understanding of the role and importance of children's defense counsel.

Through systemic reform, NJDC seeks to disrupt the harmful impacts of the justice system on children, families, and communities; decriminalize adolescence, particularly where youth of color are treated disparately; and ensure the constitutional protection of counsel for all young people in court.



GAULT AT 50 CAMPAIGN

On May 15, 2016, NJDC launched the *Gault* at 50 Campaign to raise awareness of the ongoing deprivation of youth rights and the work still needed to fulfill the promise of *In re Gault*. Advocates and defenders signed the *Gault* at 50 Statement of Principles supporting efforts to strengthen juvenile defense and decriminalize childhood, and over 60 commemorative events were held around the country.



CAMPAIGN AGAINST INDISCRIMINATE JUVENILE SHACKLING

NJDC led the Campaign Against Indiscriminate Juvenile Shackling, a national effort to end the automatic shackling of children in court. The campaign worked with state-based advocates, judges, media, and medical professionals in more than 30 states and territories to educate stakeholders on the serious harms of shackling youth and to promote laws, regulations, and court orders limiting the degrading and dehumanizing practice of chaining children.



Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships

ENGAGING YOUTH AND THEIR CIRCLES OF SUPPORT TO STRENGTHEN DEFENDERS AND COMMUNITIES, WHILE BUILDING BRIDGES TO COMMON GROUND AND COLLABORATION

The National Juvenile Defender Center believes community partnerships present an extraordinary opportunity for defenders to cultivate change driven by youth and families most impacted by the juvenile court system.

Juvenile defenders are entrusted to listen to children's stories and voice them to the court. Defenders are ethically obligated to advocate for the expressed interests of youth; to learn about the barriers facing young people and carve a way forward that nourishes children's interests, positively addresses areas of challenge, and promises accountability.

But when these plans are created in a vacuum — without the input of the child, the family, or the child's support network — the efforts can be quickly derailed at the expense of young people's futures.

That's why NJDC is promoting partnerships that foster creativity and collaboration between defenders and the communities they serve, with goals to provide young people new tools to be empowered in their communities, meaningfully invite families into the court process, and transform defense offices from court participants to community activists.

Join us and defend children's right to counsel



FOLLOW US ONLINE

Engage with us on Twitter at @NatJuvDefend and Facebook at facebook.com/njdc.info to spread the word about the importance of children's defense counsel.




FIGHT FOR REFORM

If the NJDC team can assist you in assessing, analyzing, or improving children's access to counsel and juvenile defender services in your state, please contact us at inquiries@njdc.info.



DONATE

Your contribution is critical to building a strong, diverse, and well-resourced community of specialized juvenile defenders to uphold children's rights. Please consider making a gift at njdc.info/donate.

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a plaid button-down shirt over a dark t-shirt, is smiling broadly and looking towards the right. He is seated in a group of people, with others visible in the background, though they are out of focus. The background appears to be an indoor setting with warm lighting.

**“NJDC has given me
the opportunity to be
seen as a go-to
leader in my
state and allowed
me to impact policy as
a frontline defender.”**

— Participant,
NJDC JTIP Training

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