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**LATINO COMMUNITY CALLS ON D.C. COUNCIL TO REJECT
INEFFECTIVE AND UNFAIR JUVENILE JUSTICE PROPOSALS**
NEW REPORT OFFERS COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF JUVENILE JUSTICE PROPOSALS

Washington, D.C. – A consortium of Latino organizations was joined today by civil rights, community and youth organizations in releasing a report on Latino youth in the District's justice system and called on the D.C. Council to reject the harsh juvenile justice proposals they have considered in the past year when they take a final vote this month. The new report, District of Columbia Responses to Youth Violence: Impact on the Latino Community, finds that some policies proposed by Council members and Mayor Anthony Williams to combat youth violence - making it easier to transfer youth to the adult criminal justice system and punishing parents of delinquent children - would be ineffective in reducing crime and would negatively impact Latino families if they became law. The groups recommended that the D.C. Council invest in effective alternatives to detention and intervention programs that hold young people accountable for their behavior and have a proven record in preventing crime and making communities safer.

"This is a momentous report. It's the first of its kind in the District to offer a thorough analysis of the juvenile justice policies being considered by the D.C. Council and the impact these would have on the Latino community," said Denise Gilman, lead author of the report and Project Director for Immigrant and Refugee Rights at the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. "The proposed policies would not make our community safer and would not be fair to Latino families, and we urge the D.C. Council to reject them now and consider more effective alternatives."

While the D.C. Council has removed many of the most objectionable provisions from the original proposals; the groups are concerned that these may resurface. The report's key findings demonstrate that many of the policies to combat youth violence which the D.C. Council has considered since the fall of 2003 would have severe and unfair consequences for Latino families and other youth and families of color:

- Latino youth appear to be represented in the juvenile justice system at rates disproportionately higher than the District's Hispanic population. There are no specific numbers, however, because the District of Columbia has failed to collect data broken down by race and ethnicity, despite federal requirements to collect such information.
- Some proposals considered by the D.C. Council, if adopted, would lead to deportation proceedings for many Latino youth and their families, including legal permanent residents (green card holders) and others legally in the U.S. Deportation is an extreme penalty and a drastic measure that would be imposed on top of criminal justice sanctions and would unfairly impact immigrants.

- Some measures introduced in the D.C. Council would limit the ability of families to obtain government benefits and services, including driver's licenses and subsidized housing. This would have a particularly harsh impact on Hispanic families who already face major barriers in accessing District of Columbia government programs.

"Trying youth offenders as adults may sound tough, but as this analysis shows, it's not a smart approach," said Lori Kaplan, Executive Director of the Latin American Youth Center. "We are here to remind the D.C. Council that crime and drug policies should be guided by principles of fairness and equality, and should be driven by results that are measurable and, most importantly, that yield success."

The coalition supports the recommendations of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform, which provide a sound blueprint for effective reform based on research and experience from around the country but have been largely ignored by District policy-makers. A number of studies have shown that the best strategies for combating youth crimes are those that focus on education (such as after-school programs), skills training, individual counseling, and behavioral programs. The most successful include community-level treatment and prevention programs that involve the family, community-based service providers, and government agencies.

"Programs such as after-school activities in sports and arts, mental health services, substance abuse rehabilitation, and parental interaction programs can help teenagers turn their lives around, reunite families, and reinvigorate communities," said Beatriz Otero, Executive Director of Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center.

"It stands to reason that community-based organizations that provide family-based treatment and prevention services are more likely to have faster recovery rates and lower rates of recidivism," said Marian Urquilla, Executive Director of the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative. "Simply put, the family provides a better support system for youth offenders than the prison population does."

The report's authors are the National Council of La Raza, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, and the law firms of Foley & Lardner, LLP and Piper Rudnick, LLP. At a briefing held today for the D.C. Council and the press, the authors were joined by the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative, the Latin American Youth Center, the Youth Law Center, and the Justice 4 DC Youth Coalition, as well as Latino families who spoke about the personal impact of these policies. The briefing was hosted at the Wilson Building by the D.C. Council's Subcommittee on Human Rights, Latino Affairs and Property Management, whose members include Jim Graham (Ward One), Adrian Fenty (Ward Four), and Phil Mendelson (At-Large).

"Getting tough on crime sounds good, but this report clearly shows that to rely on incarceration and harsh penalties across the board is to rely on an oversimplified response to a complex problem," said Raul Yzaguirre, President of the National Council of La Raza, which was a co-author of the report. "The Latino community cares very much about reducing crime and helping Hispanic youth achieve their full potential. But these proposals are misguided – no family should face the risk of deportation because they have a troubled child in the District's juvenile justice system."

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