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Contact: Elizabeth Johnson
334-224-0059 / elizabeth.johnson@splcenter.org

**Letter to State Legislative Candidates Calls Attention to Children
Prosecuted as Adults in Florida**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Florida prosecutes more children as adults than any other state and it's up to the state legislature to take action, the No Place for a Child coalition said in a letter sent to state legislative candidates.

“Florida’s youth are too often pushed into the adult system and branded with a felony conviction that will create lifelong obstacles to finding housing, education and employment,” said **Scott McCoy, senior policy counsel for the Southern Poverty Law Center**, a member of No Place for a Child. “It’s past time for elected officials in Florida to end the abysmal practice of locking up children as adults, an injustice that goes against their constituents’ wishes. The adult criminal justice system is no place for a child.”

Since 2009, more than 15,000 children have been prosecuted as adults in Florida. Nearly all of them are transferred to the adult system at the sole discretion of prosecutors without any input for review by a judge through a system commonly referred to as “direct file.” Black and Latino youth are disproportionately prosecuted in the adult system and burdened by the collateral consequences of adult felony convictions. In Florida, children who are prosecuted as adults are required to be housed in adult facilities. They are at greater risk of recidivism, sexual assault, and suicide than their peers in juvenile facilities.

The coalition will ask legislators to address children in the adult criminal justice system during the next session, and the letter serves as an introduction to the issue. The letter was sent to every candidate who will appear on the November ballot for a Florida House or Senate seat.

“It is beyond time for Florida to stop the inhumane and unjust practice of locking up children in adult prisons,” said **Kara Gross, legislative counsel for the ACLU of Florida**, a member of No Place for a Child. “Sending a child to spend their formative years in an adult jail or prison is counterproductive and cruel. Such a practice can only be justifiable in extreme cases. That is not how our current system is operating. We are counting on our elected officials to reverse this injustice.”

Despite widespread support to reform this system, the Legislature has failed to act. The letter references a 2017 poll from Right on Crime that found 70 percent of Floridians believe judges – not prosecutors – should decide whether to prosecute a child as an adult.

“Unless our elected officials address the issue of direct filing our Florida kids to adult prisons, our children will continue to earn the dubious distinction of leading the nation in the number of kids incarcerated in adult facilities,” said **Charlotte Nycklemoe with League of Women Voters Florida**, a member of No Place for a Child. “The Florida ‘direct file’ statute gives prosecutors unfettered discretion to send juveniles to adult court. We believe the decision to prosecute a child should be placed in the hands of a juvenile judge, not the prosecutor.”

No Place for a Child believes that the adult criminal justice system is no place for a child. The coalition is focused on educating legislators to garner support for reforms that include prohibiting adult prosecution of children younger than 14, creating a hearing in which a judge can review a prosecutor’s decision to charge a child as an adult, and assessing children charged as adults to ensure age-appropriate sanctions.

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No Place for a Child is a diverse, nonpartisan coalition of organizations committed to bringing changes to Florida that are proven to be more effective for youth and the public. For more information, visit www.NoPlaceForAChild.com.