

**A Story of Challenging Youth
Incarceration in Louisiana**
A Coloring and Activity Book

Because the need for reform is basic.



FFLIC

Acknowledgements



Our hearts and gratitude go out to the parents and members of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) who share their stories, advocate for children, and face the challenges described in this book. The storytellers/artists Florentina Staigers Cruz and Antonio Cruz Jr. offer a special thanks to the youth and families for entrusting them to put their stories on the page.

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Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

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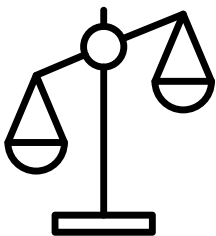
Please Take Care



FFLIC created this book as a learning tool to support youth and families in building an informed community network to fight injustice and stop the school-to-prison pipeline. We offer it with great compassion, care, and respect for what our youth and families have experienced and are struggling with in the current education and youth justice system.

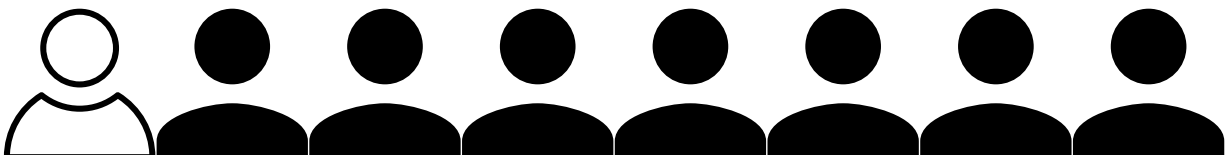
The book is intended for parents, adults, and mature youth, and it is not recommended for children without the supervision and guidance of an adult. The content can be triggering, especially for those most negatively impacted by incarceration and systemic racism. In these pages there is a lot to process and unpack, and so you might want to have a "trigger plan" for how you can take care of yourself before, during, and after using this tool. For example, do you have someone you can talk to about how you are feeling? Would it help to do an activity you enjoy after reading it? What actions could you take today to feel empowered to change the situation? These are a few suggestions, but you are the expert on how to take care of you!

There once was a place called Louisiana where the people didn't understand some children. Because they didn't understand them, the people wanted to send the children away from schools and lock them in prison cells for things that many children do and the mistakes many children make as part of growing up. They punished the children instead of helping them when they needed it, like when they were sad or sick, or when they had trouble learning.



Louisiana's youth justice system has earned a reputation as one of the worst in the nation. In the past few decades there have been frequent news stories and public reports of abuse and violence in Louisiana's youth prisons. And as a result of systemic racism, Black and brown children are most vulnerable.

In Louisiana, Black youth are nearly **7 times** more likely than white youth to be incarcerated.¹

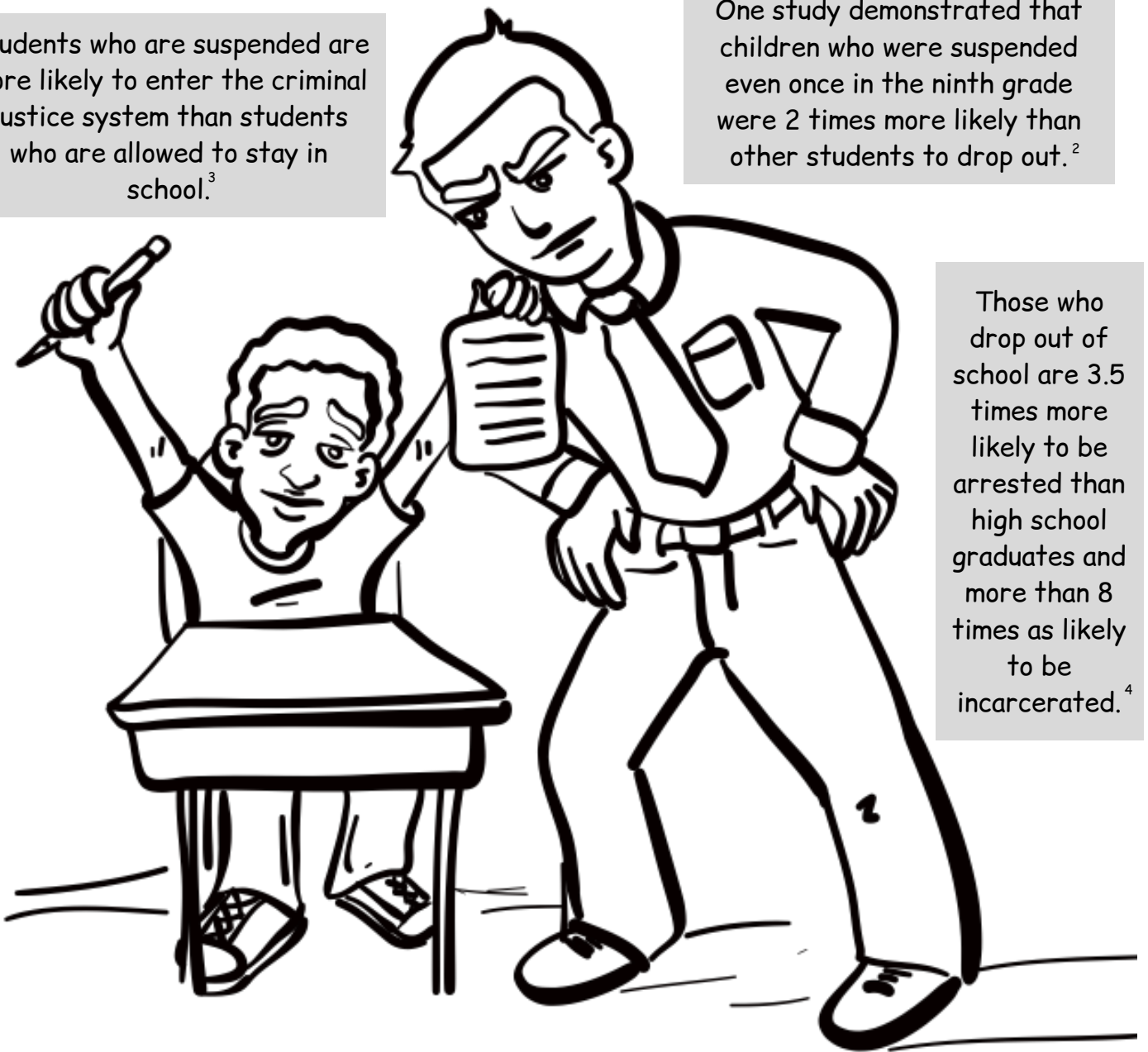


Noah was one of these children. He had ADHD, which meant that his brain worked differently than other kids' brains. It was hard for him to listen, to follow instructions the way the teachers wanted, and to focus. Sometimes he just couldn't... sit... still! But the teachers became angry and told him he was acting up. They didn't see that he was really trying, and that he was also very bright and creative. They kicked him out of different schools again and again and again.

Students who are suspended are more likely to enter the criminal justice system than students who are allowed to stay in school.³

One study demonstrated that children who were suspended even once in the ninth grade were 2 times more likely than other students to drop out.²

Those who drop out of school are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates and more than 8 times as likely to be incarcerated.⁴



When school discipline policies and practices push our nation's children, especially our most vulnerable children, out of classrooms and into the criminal justice system this is referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline."

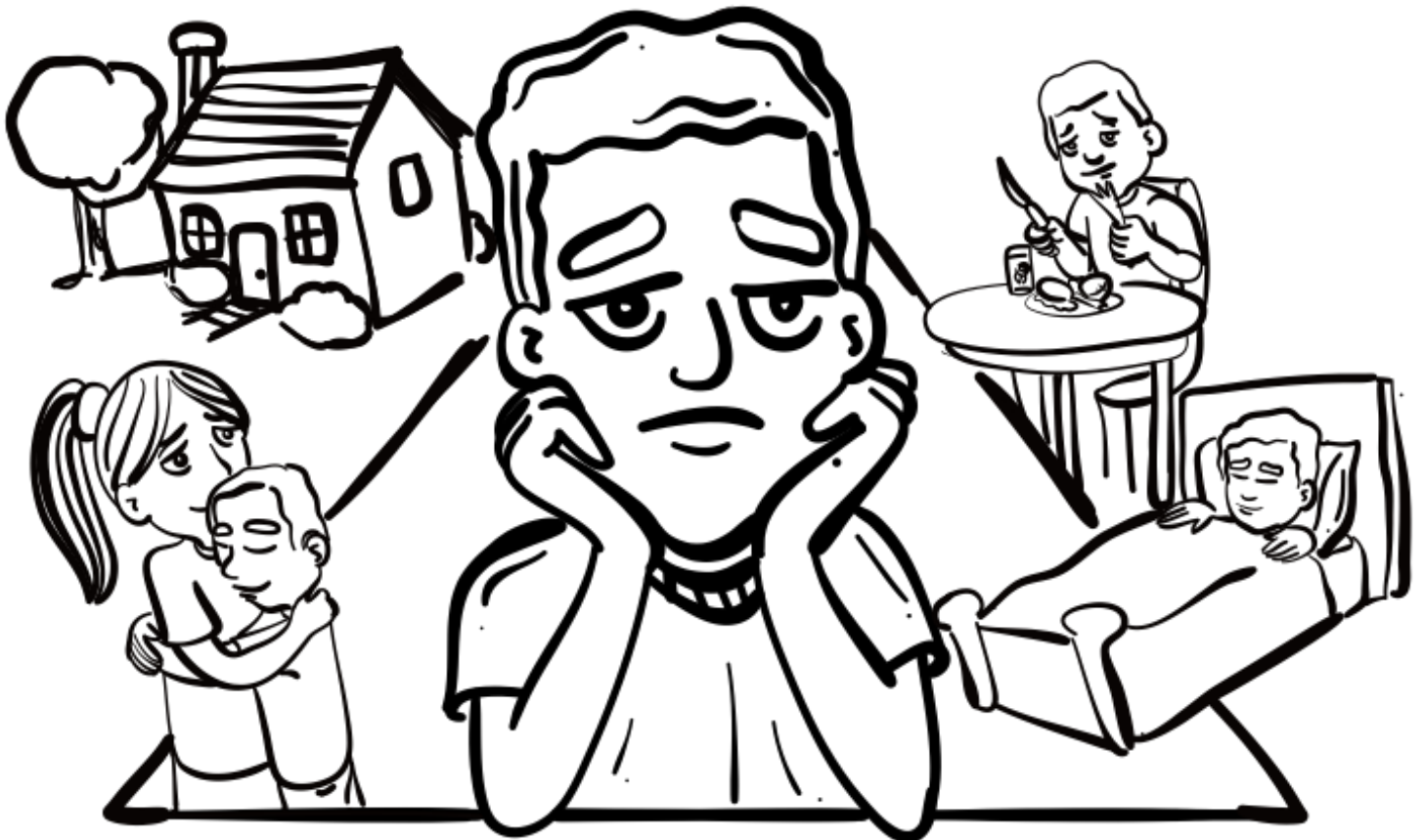
The same thing was happening to other kids whose brains worked differently. Additionally, any kid could be having problems with the way they were thinking and feeling because of life changes, like moving to a different home, divorce, or a death in the family. They could be kicked out of school for days, or even months.

57%

of incarcerated youth were sent to prison for offenses that did not involve either violence or weapons.⁵

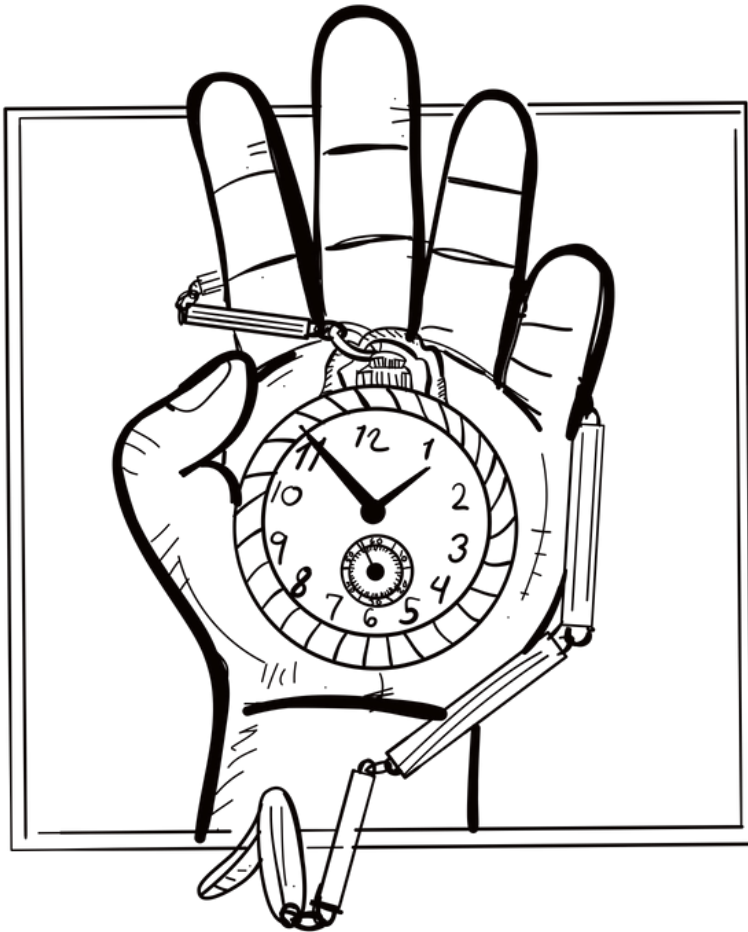
73%

of incarcerated youth in Louisiana suffer from mental health challenges.⁶



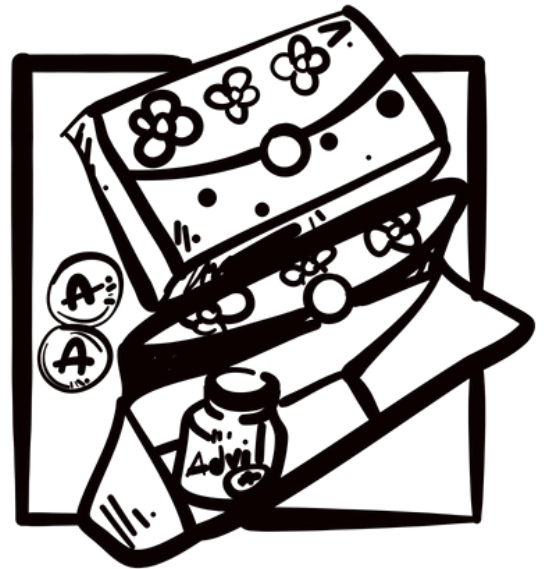
In the U.S., students lose 11 million days of instruction as a result of disciplinary suspensions. This translates to more than 60,000 school years, more than 60 million hours of lost education, and billions of dollars wasted. And this is all in a single school year.⁷

Sometimes it was just one simple act that landed a kid in trouble. Noah heard about Amanda, a sophomore in Shreveport, who was expelled for one year because she had Advil in her purse.⁸ In Alexandria, Kameryan, a second-grader brought her grandfather's antique pocket watch for show-and-tell, and she was suspended for a month because the watch had a one-inch pocket knife.⁹

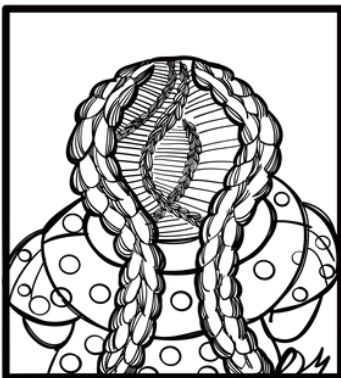


Zero-tolerance

policies require suspensions and expulsions without considering the circumstances.



Other examples of unfair and harsh discipline are the following....



A six-year-old was threatened with suspension because she had pink ribbon braided into her hair.



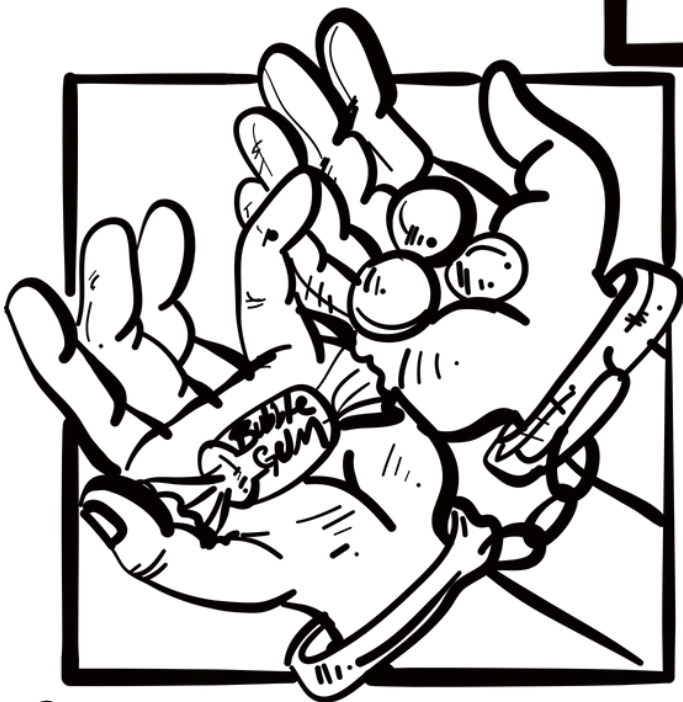
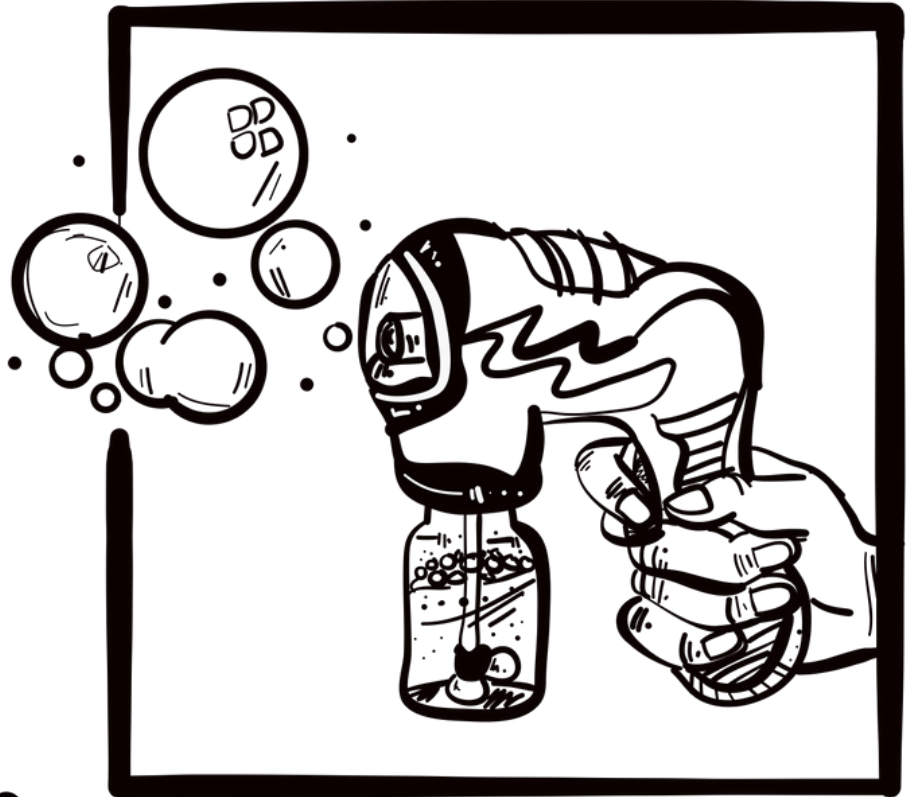
A nine-year-old reported being bullied, but the school did nothing. Then, when he fought back he was suspended for five days.



A student was sent home with her mother because she laughed twice in class. The school did not document the suspension.

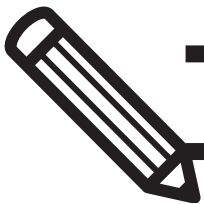
Noah heard of similar things happening in other states too. In Colorado, a kindergartener was suspended for bringing a bubble-blowing gun to school.¹⁰ In Illinois, a six-year-old named Madisyn was handcuffed for taking candy off her teacher's desk.¹¹

Despite the historic anti-poverty and civil rights efforts of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, in the past few decades our nation and state have been moving in the wrong direction by enacting zero-tolerance policies, which fuel the school-to-prison pipeline.

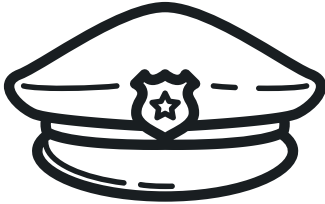


Self-care Break:

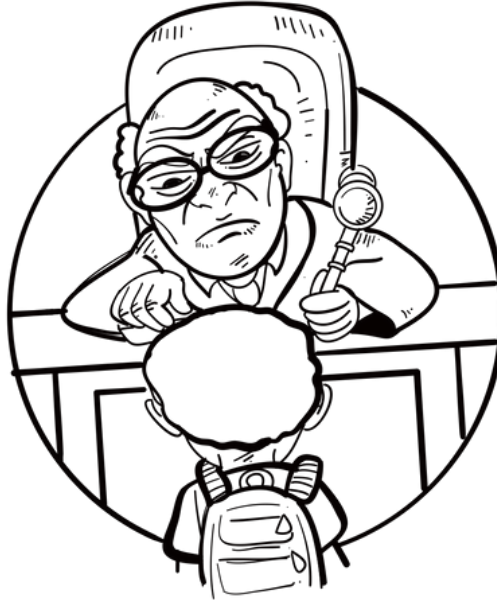
Sadly, these stories are true. Take a few deep breaths and use these lines to express how you are feeling and what you are thinking.



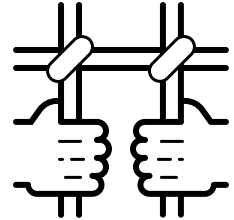
In Noah's case, instead of trying to understand or help him, his school punished him. The school sent Noah and his mother to a judge, and the judge sent Noah to prison. His mother pleaded for them to release her son, but they wouldn't. Noah was trapped in the system.



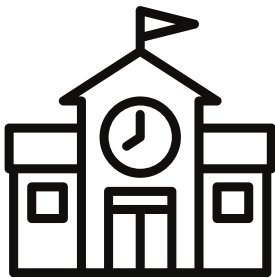
Law
Enforcement



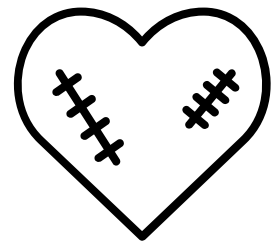
Courts



Prisons



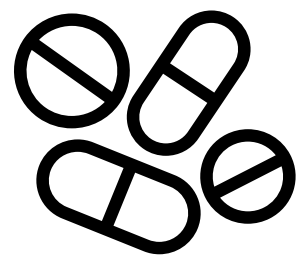
Schools



Abuse
or Neglect



Public Health



Addiction



Developmental
challenges

These words represent different parts of the youth incarceration system, with the family and child at the center. Circle the word/phrase that you think is most important. Later, you might choose to focus your advocacy on making changes in this area.



Mental Health
Challenges

One day when Noah was trying to take a nap in his cell, he got a surprise visit from another judge. She was not the same judge who sent him to prison. She said she was a 'Chief Justice' and she was with a group of people who wanted to help him.



Courts historically have played an essential role in protecting the rights of citizens. A chief justice is the highest member of a supreme court, which is the highest court in the state or in the country.

The Chief Justice began to tell Noah a story. It was a story about a law, Act 1225, that passed in 2003 because lawmakers wanted to change the way children were treated. She told him that the lawmakers had heard of the horrible things happening to children.

In 2001 and 2002 parents of incarcerated youth began to organize more formally as FFLIC to raise awareness of the horrific conditions and abuses at Louisiana's youth facilities, in particular the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth, the country's worst youth prison. They held a mock jazz funeral to mourn the lost freedom and dreams of children and collaborated with local and national organizations to advocate for a bill that would reform the youth justice system. The bill became Act 1225.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

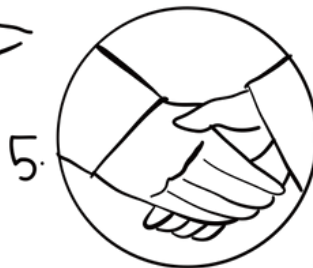
A bill, which is an idea for a new law, is introduced in either the House or Senate



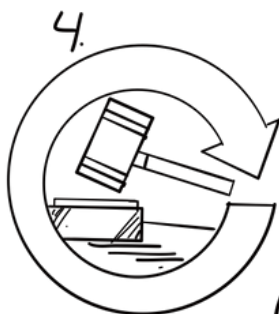
It goes to a committee and they have public meetings before voting on it.



If it passes through committee the entire House or Senate must vote on the bill.



Sidenote: A bill can (and often does) fail at any stage in the process!



Then it goes through the same process again in either the House or Senate (whichever didn't hear it the first time.)



The Governor signs the bill and the bill becomes an "Act" or law. Or the Governor can reject or "veto" the bill and then 2/3 of the House and Senate must vote to pass it to become law.

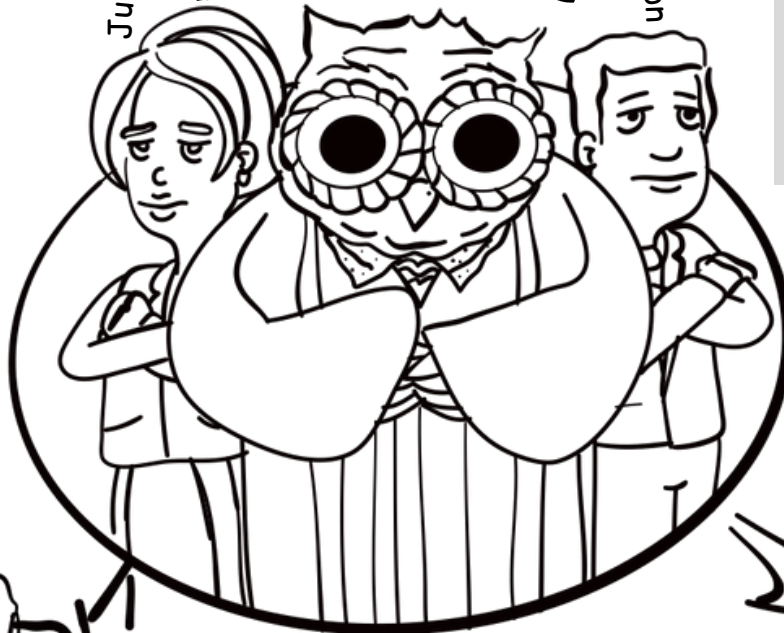
The House and Senate have to agree on the bill language. Or it gets sent to a "conference committee" to see if they can work out the differences.

The law brought together a group of people to help children. They were called the JJRAIC. They would lead all the other people in the state who wanted to help too.



Act 1225 of 2003 was the call to action to fix our broken youth justice system and address historical and systemic injustice and abuses in the system in Louisiana. Its passage closed the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth and was a major success for advocates. It created the JJRAIC.

JJRAIC
Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission



The JJRAIC brought together people from three main sectors of government (which are set out as chapters in the LA Revised Code).



Justice



Education



Public Welfare and Assistance
(Well-being)

There were many people wanting to help children. Some were helping to educate children. Some were helping the children's parents buy food for the family. Some were making sure the children had homes where they could sleep. Others were helping sick children get medicine. All of them were doing their part to help children and their families.



Act 1225 gave the JJRAIC the responsibility of overseeing efforts to help children, the "continued reform" of the youth justice law, and doing the following:

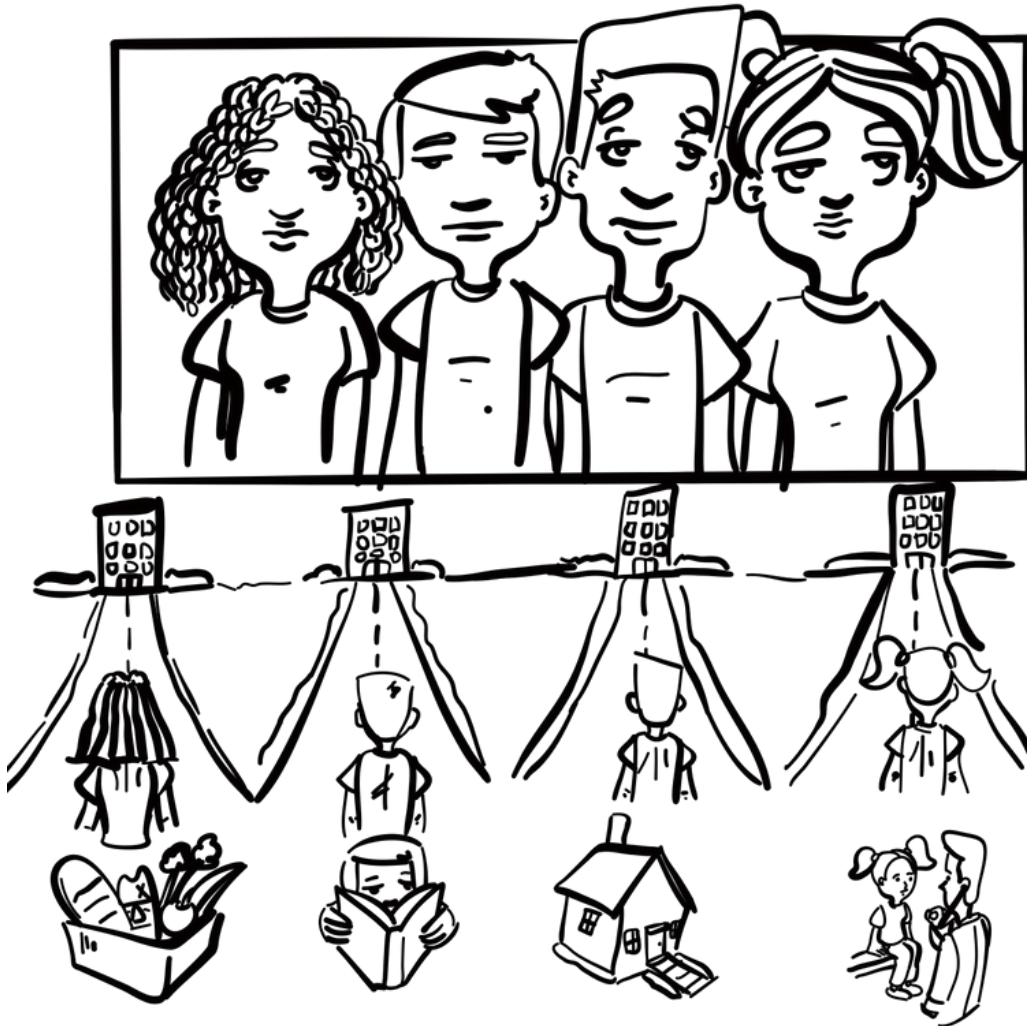
- Hold meetings
- Put forward ideas for laws that protect young people
- Use government services that are usually only available to elected officials
- Carry out or ask for a study
- Ask for data or assistance from state agencies
- Get involved in legal matters, if there is a majority vote
- Create a single state institution to provide services to children and families
- Look at budgets of state agencies and institutions
- Look at state delinquency programs and judge how well they are working, as well as law enforcement practices and relationships
- Review and comment on the Governor's report (which is offered through their Children's Cabinet)
- Report to the Governor's office

The law, ACT 1225, brought all of these helpers together. But there was a problem. The helpers didn't talk to each other enough. So they had to learn to talk more so that they could share all the information they knew about each child. For example, Was Tomas eating three times a day? Did Ben have a place to sleep? Could Tanya read? The helpers also needed to agree on who would do what.



Act 1225 required agencies to develop plans and cooperation agreements to share data about children in general, as well as youth involved in the justice system, and their families. But unfortunately, a couple of years later, another law, Act 119 of 2005, replaced Act 1225. Act 119 only encouraged agencies to share data, instead of requiring it. In 2016 the Governor recommitted to broader collaboration by signing an executive order (JBE 16-31) creating a "Coordinated System of Care Governance Board" (CSCGB) within the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, which requires some coordination.

The helpers also worked alone in many different places. If a child needed help, they had to travel far to visit each helper in those different places. The law asked the helpers to gather together to work in only one place so that a child only needed to travel to visit one building to receive all of the help they and their families needed.



Act 1225 saw the benefit of reducing the number of state agencies handling children and bringing services into one new agency, or a "single state entity." The law recommended that the state have "a more appropriate mission" for youth justice, meaning a mission that better reflects our intentions and values. It gave the JJRAIC the task of developing the plan to integrate agencies into a new agency. Had this happened, it would have caused a major change in how justice for youth is handled in Louisiana. Unfortunately, the single state entity was never created, though the (CSCGB) has served a similar, but incomplete, purpose.



Self-Care Break:

Take a few deep breaths. Then write down 3 values that are important to you in deciding how we handle children in the system.



"Now to understand how the helpers worked together," the Chief Justice said to Noah, "you can imagine three teams of helpers. The teams were called 'Well-Being,' 'Education,' and 'Justice.' The first team, Well-Being, was supposed to make sure that every child and their family had everything they needed: health, a home, food, safety, security, and help handling their emotions." Noah nodded. He wished the helpers had known he had needed this help.

All of the leaders of the state agencies that deal with children came together to form "The Children's Cabinet" in order "to lift children and their families out of poverty." The Children's Cabinet is part of the Governor's office and is responsible for funds, programs, and services at the state and local level, related to children and their families.



Act 1225 gave the Children's Cabinet new duties: to submit a plan to improve services for incarcerated youth, to coordinate services, improve communication and systems, pool funds, and address the lack of funding. The bill also outlined priorities, including mental health services, alternatives to incarceration, and community programs. But the work was never fully completed. It is clear that the changes Act 1225 called for were never fully carried out.

Because the children and families had so many needs, the leaders of the Well-Being Team needed more information. They had questions like, “how many children didn’t have food?” and “why were schools sending so many children home from school?” So they asked some of the helpers to gather information. They also realized that children in different places needed different things. So they decided each place would have their own group of leaders that would decide how to work together.

Info
is
critical!

Children's Cabinet Research Council

Act 1225 created the Children's Cabinet Research Council, which was a group of people that would offer important information to the Children's Cabinet. But in 2016 it became a council focused only on the "Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren."



Children and Youth Planning Boards

Lawmakers also passed Act 555 in 2004 to require local parishes to create Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPBs) to look over, coordinate, prioritize, and measure all available local services and programs that address the needs of children and youth. The CYPBs were given the task of preventing and minimizing the incarceration of youth by helping local community services work together to create a safety net for children and youth.

The work
is local
too!

The Chief Justice continued. "The second team, 'Education,' is made up of teachers, principals, school staff, and everyone helping to run schools and make rules for schools and students. These helpers are very important and play a special part in protecting and helping children."

Act 1225 recognized that schools and the justice system have to work together. It required the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Juvenile Justice Planning and Coordination Board to come up with a "model master plan" for improving behavior and discipline in schools. But unfortunately, it did not create a process for evaluating the school's efforts or holding the schools accountable.



EDUCATION

Poor school climate, lack of school connectedness, lack of teacher and administrative support, punitive school discipline policies and practices, and lack of school safety are associated with youth aggression and victimization, risk behaviors, exposure to violence, bullying involvement, poor school attendance, suspension, expulsion, school disengagement and dropout.¹²

vs.

In a positive school climate --where students feel connected to their schools and have a sense of caring and closeness to teachers and the overall school environment-- students report less victimization, demonstrate fewer aggressive behaviors, and cope more effectively.¹³

"The third team is called 'Justice.' Once a child gets into trouble, it is up to this team to help that child understand that what they did was wrong and to teach them different ways of behaving. Some of these helpers are judges, lawyers, advocates, and people working in the jails and prisons."

JUSTICE



Louisiana Prison History¹⁴

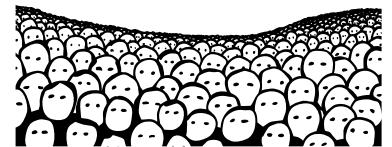


Before 1900's

- Before there were prisons, which began developing in the 1700s, corporal or capital punishment was used for serious crimes.
- Children and adults with mental health and/or behavioral challenges were treated the same - locked up away from the public.

Early 1900's

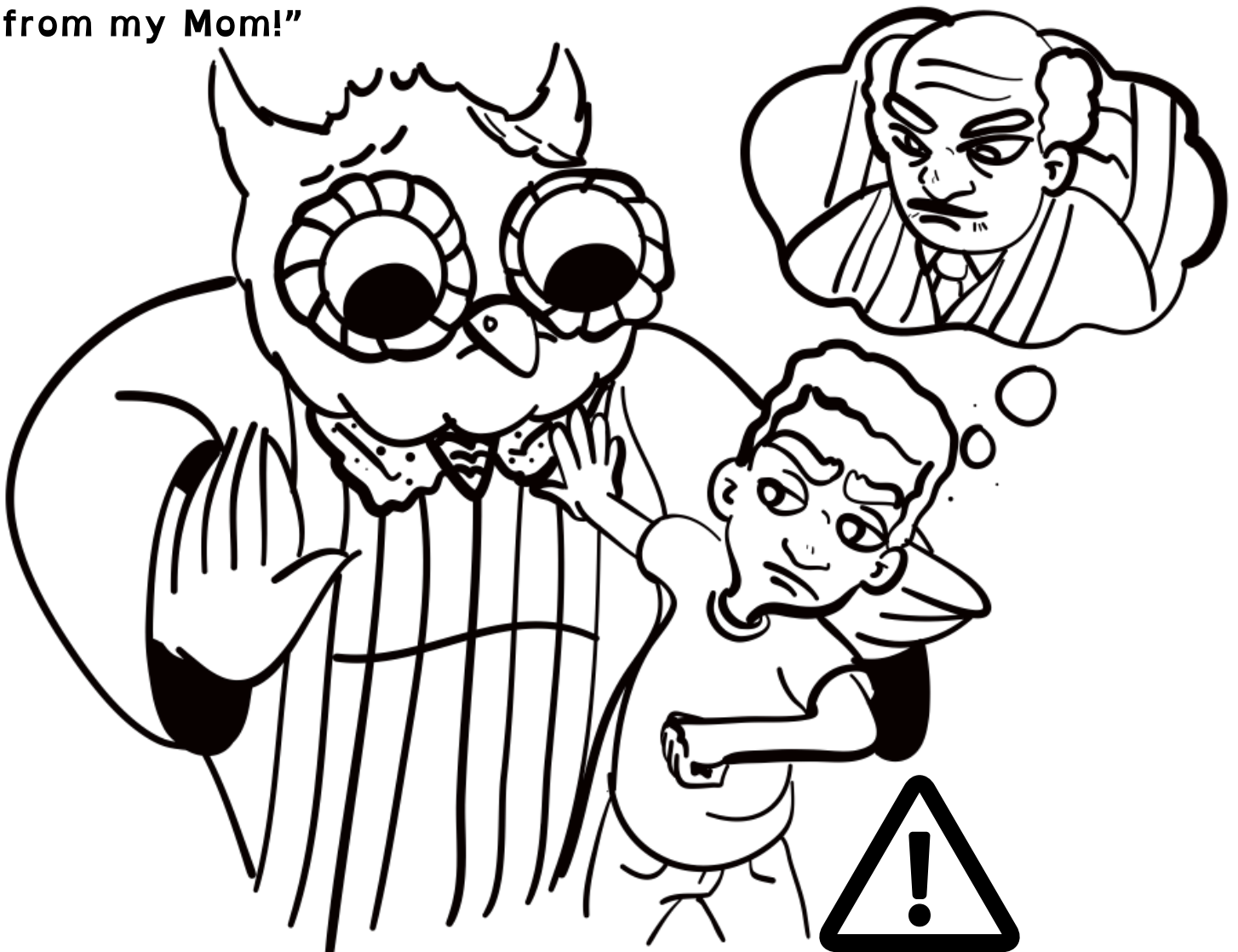
- Advocates began to call for the separation of youth in adult prisons with a stated focus on rehabilitation for youth. (Rehabilitation for youth means restoring them to a normal, healthy life.)
- White children were more often sent to "reformatories," but Black children were still put in adult prisons.
- In 1969 the Supreme Court ended "separate, but equal" facilities.



1970 - 1990

- Serious overcrowding began.
- A federal law was passed to separate youth and adults, and later a LA law.
- The first high-profile investigation of abuses took place.
- We saw a shift from rehabilitation as "get tough" policies became popular.

While listening to the Chief Justice, Noah realized that it was the Justice Team that had sent him away from his family and put him in prison. He couldn't help but interrupt, "The Justice Team doesn't help kids! I don't deserve to be here away from my Mom!"



1990 - present

- There was a clear move from child-centered emphasis and towards modeling an adult system.
- The state tried to transfer youth to adult prisons to ease overcrowding but this was ruled unconstitutional.
- Human rights violations continue to be exposed including horrible conditions in facilities and abuse of youth.
- There are ongoing attempts to fix the system but without substantial impact. Tensions remain between advocates, the state, and the federal government. This is why Act 1225 was and is so important!

Issues identified by human rights reports, lawsuits and calls for reform:

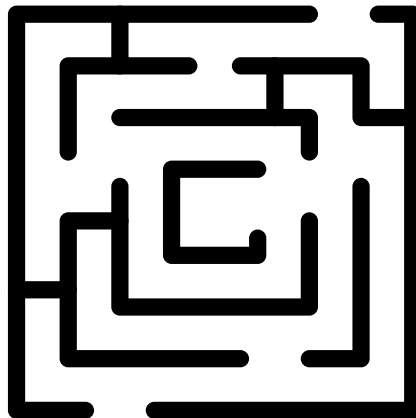
- over-representation of Black and brown youth
- on-going human rights violations
- youth re-entering the system
- fragmented services
- rehabilitation vs. public safety
- inappropriate treatment for children and youth with disabilities
- limited substance abuse treatment
- lack of local control, alternatives and aftercare
- lack of community-based alternatives
- ineffectiveness of large prisons

The Chief Justice looked sadly at Noah and then nodded. "I agree. Remember the helpers who gather the information? Well, those helpers have gathered lots of information on what helps children. We know what works for children is when we keep them in their communities and in contact with their families instead of sending them away."

Youth prisons and detention facilities have been shown to be dangerous, ineffective, and unnecessary.



A longstanding and growing body of research shows that incarcerating youth can have extremely negative consequences for a youth's ability to get back on the right track.¹⁵



Community-based supervision programs for youth cost less than confinement, and they increase the rehabilitative benefits to the youth, such as fewer youth reentering the system, better treatment, reduced stigma, and increased family participation.¹⁶

"It's also better for the whole state of Louisiana if we stop sending kids to prison," the Chief Justice explained. "Because we are spending more on locking them up in cells than we spend on teaching them in schools."

"Then why am I here in this prison?," asked Noah.

Research has consistently shown that diversion and community supervision programs are more cost-effective than incarceration.¹⁷



Confinement

\$\$\$

Education

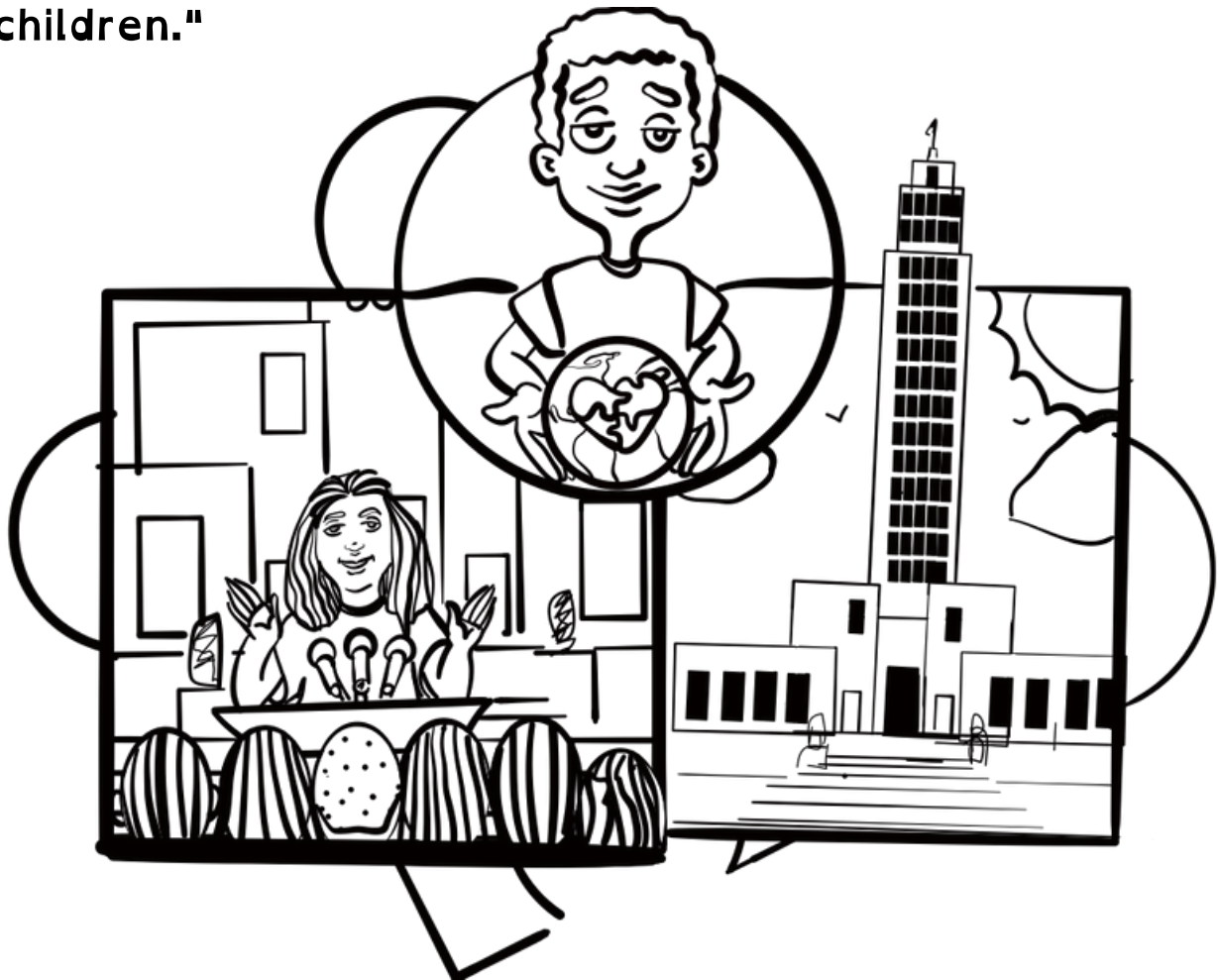
\$0
\$50,000
\$100,000
\$150,000
\$200,000

In Louisiana it can cost
\$155K/year to imprison a child
but only \$11K/year for public
education.¹⁸

Self-Care Break

Take a few deep breaths and think about why Noah is in prison. Then write one thing you could do to help kids like Noah.

The Chief Justice paused. "There is no easy answer, but what I can tell you is that many people are fighting for things to be better. Act 1225 is like a giant puzzle that lawmakers put together. But then all the helpers walked away each holding a piece. We have to all come together for us to put the puzzle back together and create the world we want to see for children."



FFLIC has developed a three-point platform for our "Let Kids Be Kids" Campaign, which urges Louisiana's leaders to come together to holistically address the critical needs of children related to mental health, education, and poverty. Looking through FFLIC's lens, we believe that if the state did what we were supposed to do for children's mental health, education, and poverty, there would be less need for the justice system.

MENTAL HEALTH

Prison is the wrong place to meet mental health needs, but 73% of Louisiana's incarcerated children suffer from mental health challenges.¹⁹

EDUCATION

Education is key to a child's development and their ability to contribute to society, but Louisiana ranks 49th in education.²⁰

POVERTY

Poverty is a form of violence that can lead to crime in order to survive, but Louisiana ranks 50th in economic well-being of its children.²¹

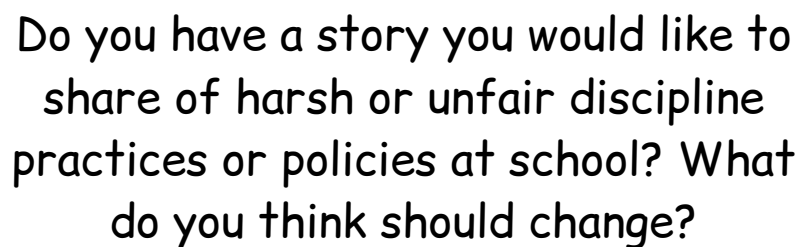
“Well, can we put the puzzle together again?” asked Noah. The Chief Justice stared at him for a moment. “I hope so. That’s why I am here. We need your help Noah. We need your Mom’s help. We need your friends’ help. We need the youth, their parents, the lawmakers, and the entire community to come together. We need all of your stories and all of your voices.”

“Okay,” agreed Noah. “I want to help! How do I begin?”



We need your help too!

Visit www.fflic.org/take-action-now for a list of things you can do today to make a difference.



Use additional pages or type your response if desired.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



FFLIC

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MAIL TO: FFLIC, 1307 Oretha C. Haley Blvd, Suite #304, New Orleans, LA 70113.

EMAIL: fflic@fflic.org.



Draw your vision of what kids need, how we should spend money on them, or how we can better support them.

Name _____
Age _____
Email _____
Phone _____



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Join us

We want you to receive the support you need to fight for your child and ALL children. Contact us to learn more about our work or become a FFLIC member.

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