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Juvenile Justice Coalition of Ohio Statement on the Passing of S.B. 256 in the House

Columbus, OH — Following the Ohio Legislature’s vote to pass Senate Bill 256 in the House, eliminating the ability to sentence juveniles to life without parole, **Kenza Kamal, Policy Director at the Juvenile Justice Coalition of Ohio (JJC)**, released the following statement:

“We applaud the Ohio Legislature for voting to end the cruel practice of sentencing juveniles to life without parole with an overwhelming majority. JJC has advocated to end these harsh sentences for years, and we’re proud to have joined the activists, organizations, and families and young people harmed by the juvenile criminal system who supported the passage of S.B. 256. The passing of this bill is long overdue, and we await Governor DeWine’s signature to enact the law and modify the sentence of any young people currently incarcerated with life without parole.

“For years, we have known that extreme punishment for young people is harmful to their growth and the future of our communities. Ohio spends millions of dollars confining and incarcerating young people, denying their humanity and dignity, rather than empowering them and investing in their communities and schools.

“The passing of S.B. 256 is an important and necessary step, but there is still much work to be done. The bill does not guarantee that people currently with a juvenile life sentence without parole will be released and only offers them the chance for a parole hearing. People who were sentenced to life as juveniles have been failed by our systems: they’re more likely to be Black, to have experienced abuse or witnessed regular violence, and have otherwise adverse childhood experiences.

“We need a continued commitment to youth justice in Ohio to repair this, which is why JJC continues to work toward the end of youth incarceration across the state and advocates for increased investments in community-based alternatives for our children and young people.”

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Juvenile Justice Coalition is a statewide organization that works through policy advocacy and with Ohio youth and families who are at risk of involvement or involved in the juvenile court system.