

# THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

## STATEMENT OF CONCERN THE ARTS AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

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### BACKGROUND

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The arts have a robust history of research and practice that can be used to articulate a comprehensive theory of change regarding the relationship between creative youth development and juvenile justice reform. According to the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) longitudinal *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth* study, at-risk students who have access to the arts in or out of school also tend to have better academic results, better workforce opportunities, higher career goals, and more civic engagement. The study reports these and other positive outcomes associated with high levels of arts exposure for youth of low socioeconomic status—youth most often at the greatest risk of justice-involvement.

As Congress focuses on criminal justice system reform and moves to implementation of the newly reauthorized Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), we urge members to recognize the transformative potential of the arts as a partner in juvenile justice reform efforts.

Recognizing that significant lasting change requires a multisystem effort, the arts are a tool for working collaboratively across sectors to achieve both systems improvements and positive outcomes for youth. There are many points of possible engagement with the arts across the entire juvenile justice system, ranging from prevention to high-quality arts education for youth in state secure facilities, to the use of arts programs as an alternative to sentencing, and to support successful re-entry into communities.

There is a critical need in the juvenile justice field for training, technical assistance, model programs, and research and evaluation to develop and disseminate promising arts-based, arts education, and art therapy programs that support state and local juvenile justice reform efforts across the country.

### STATEMENT OF CONCERN

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#### We urge the 116th Congress to:

- **Build upon the successfully reauthorized Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP).** In a demonstration of powerful bipartisanship, JJDP was reauthorized at the end of the 115th Congress. However, as with the FIRST STEP Act to reform the larger criminal justice system, there remain significant unfinished reforms of the juvenile justice system, we respectfully urge Congress to build upon the success of JJDP to further improve our nation's juvenile justice processes and to explicitly articulate and support the innovative role the arts can play in supporting these efforts.
- **Build the evidentiary base for arts-based and art therapy practices through federally-funded research.** A 2016 literature review published by the OJJDP in partnership with the NEA identified positive

correlations between arts participation and outcomes for at-risk, justice-involved, and traumatized youths, but also noted that the quantity and quality of the research is limited and suffers from methodological deficiencies. The evidentiary base for arts-based programming needs to be further expanded through rigorous, longitudinal evaluations of long-term interventions with sufficient number of participants to provide reliable data.

- **Reformulate federal grant requirements to reward the inclusion of creative youth development principles and strengths-based strategies in programs that serve youth in the juvenile justice system.** Target funding toward effective community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration that are framed and evaluated in terms of the positive assets they seek to encourage in youth.
- **Improve the quality of education in the juvenile justice system through the inclusion of the arts.** Impoverished education ranks high among the factors that deter youth development in the juvenile justice system (Southern Educational Foundation, 2014). Congress should extend equitable access to the arts for incarcerated youth through the Well-Rounded Education provisions of the ESSA and make explicit the opportunities for the arts to help achieve Title I objectives and provide guidance to states on how ESSA Title I, Part D funding can be used to support arts education.
- **Support arts-focused interagency collaboration.** OJJDP and NEA have undertaken notable arts and justice collaborations since 1995, including the YouthArts Development Project, the publication of a 2002 Guide to Promising Practices in Arts Programs for Juvenile Offenders in Detention and Corrections, and the 2016 literature review. We urge further collaboration and appropriation of funding to explore other interagency collaboration, such as through the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP) or the Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development, to identify and disseminate promising and effective cross-sector strategies.
- **Support state and local efforts to invest in community-based alternatives to incarceration.** Investigate model public-private partnership efforts between arts initiatives and city and state law enforcement agencies, such as those in New York City, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, and partner with national grassroots efforts such as Create Justice, the Creative Youth Development National Partnership, and the Art for Justice Fund cohort. ArtPlace America recently published a field scan exploring the ways arts and culture intersect with public safety. A growing community of practitioners at the intersection of these two fields is well-poised to promote further collaboration and learning between the creative and public safety sectors.