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Associate for Technical Assistance

NYS Youth Justice Institute

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September 14, 2020

Hello,

I am the Associate for Technical Assistance at the New York State Youth Justice Institute (YJI). The YJI is an initiative of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Office of Children and Family Services and the University at Albany. The YJI strives to build and strengthen the capacity of localities around New York State to adopt evidence-informed youth justice practices.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we hosted a web-based panel series, entitled *Are the Kids Alright? COVID-19 + Youth Forum*, from June 2-June 5. The forum discussed the pandemic's current and foreseeable impacts on children, teens, and young adults, as well as innovative approaches to the crisis, with a focus on historically marginalized populations. The forum is part of an ongoing effort at the YJI to respond to the pandemic and to reimagine a more equitable, compassionate, and empirically driven youth justice system in the context of COVID-19 as well as the fight for racial justice.

As part of this effort, we are organizing the *Empowering Youth Voices Contest: Messages from Today for Tomorrow*. The contest will give youth the opportunity to share their thoughts about the pandemic's impact on youth and the current events happening in our country. All youth (up to 21 years old) are invited to submit a creative piece in any non-video format of their choice (for example a letter, poem, essay, or drawing) that responds to any one of the following prompts:

- What would you like tell your future self?
- What would you like to tell the youth of the future?
- What would you like to tell a specific person in power (ex. health official, teacher, community leader, politician)?

We are accepting submissions from September 15, 2020 to October 15, 2020. The YJI will publish the contest winners and other selected submissions in a special issue of its monthly newsletter *On the Same Page!* Participants may choose to have their work published with their first name and last initial or anonymously. We ask that all participants complete the attached form to provide basic information and consent.

Given the difficult and traumatic nature of the pandemic and recent racial tension and social unrest, please be mindful that this project could be triggering for some youth. It is our ideal that this contest is a means for youth to join the national conversation while being supported by the adults in their lives. Please fill out the attached consent form and email a copy of it to (insert email address). Any participant 18 years or older may sign the form with consent themselves, however we require that participant's younger than 18 have their parent or legal guardian sign instead. For any additional information, please contact me at youthjustice@albany.edu.

Sincerely,



Avery Irons



**Youth Justice
Institute**