

Statement from Joshua Glenn

My name is Joshua Glenn. I am the co-founder of The Youth Art & Self-empowerment Project (YASP). YASP is a youth-led organization that work with young people that are locked up and charged as adults in Philadelphia. I am living proof that with the proper support, young people can change their lives.

When I was younger, I didn't have any good role models so just like most youth in poor and low income communities, I starting hanging around the wrong crowd and I started getting in trouble. The only reason I was able to change my life is because when I was released I started working with YASP and I received the proper support I needed to make a positive change. Philadelphia should invest in more programs like YASP that focus on the root causes of why young people commit crime and develop strategies to help young people stay out of trouble by educating them about the criminal justice and employing them as organizers to help them stand up to the injustice that the criminal justice system creates for them.

At the age of 16, I was locked up and charged as an adult and held in an adult jail for a crime I did not commit. I was held pretrial for 18 months because I couldn't afford to pay my bail. While I was locked up in an adult jail, it was like being in solitary confinement because we were housed on two cell blocks in Philadelphia's House of Correction, a very old and overcrowded jail. We spent so much time confined to one block or in our cells that it started to feel like I was an animal in a cage. At the end of those long 18 months, my case was thrown out due to lack of evidence.

My experience there caused me to develop issues with trust and showing my emotions. When I first got out of jail, my family ties were almost non-existent because I was so used to being alone that I didn't feel comfortable being around anyone. It took a long time for me to learn to let myself be close to people again.

The worst part about the whole ordeal is that I didn't get to graduate from high school. I had to struggle to make up for those lost years and find a way to get a diploma once I was released. And to this day, the adult arrest still comes up when I apply for jobs.

At the court date when my case was dismissed, my public defender tried to pressure me to take a deal by saying I was going to lose the case if we went to trial. It was hard to say no because I just wanted to go home, but I refused to plead guilty to something I didn't do. I know hundreds of people go through the same things I did when I was locked up, and many young people do give in to the pressure and accept guilty pleas whether they are guilty or not because they have been held for so long and they just want a way out.

In order to make a real change and reduce crime, we have to stop holding thousands of people pre-trial, tearing apart families of people who are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. We have to create more opportunities for young people in poor and low income communities through education and employment, and not put poor people and their families in more debt than they were before they were arrested. We have to end cash bail and stop punishing people just for being poor. We have to stop sending young people to adult prisons and jails, and invest in resources for their future instead of decades of incarceration.

These laws have been destroying our communities for far too long. We need change now.