

Statement from Terrance Williams:

Hi everyone. I'm Terrance Williams, a Leadership Team member from the Youth Art and Self-empowerment Project (YASP) and today. I'm just here to tell you a little bit about myself and the impact of being locked up & charged as an adult in Philadelphia's criminal justice system has had on me.

First off, I'm 20 and I'm from North Philly. Growing up, I didn't have it made. I had my mom but she was struggling to pay bills and keep a roof over our head, not to mention she just had gotten cleaned up from a drug addiction. I have experienced a lot in my twenty years. After completing 22 months of incarceration, in both adult and juvenile facilities, I have developed a staunch commitment to serving my peers—Philadelphia youth in need of a helping hand.

I was arrested at 17 with 8 pounds and a gun. Not to mention, I was the only one out of the four of us locked up. I got sent up to State Road with the adults and sent to the craziest jail on State Road. Now I'm booked all up with no money on my books except for 4 times out of 20 commissary days. No visits that I really wanted and no mail except from my girl. It was so stressful.

While incarcerated at an adult jail at the age of 17, I was introduced to a organization called YASP. They would come to the jails each and every Saturday to do art, poetry, and writing workshops with the juvenile block inside the adult jail. In this space, I was able to let out emotions and built up frustration through poetry and writing. During these workshops, it became clear what I wanted to do with my life, and that was share my life experience and struggles with targeted and trouble teens.

Locking up youth and charging them as adults has a major impact on our communities. Statistics say that youth who are charged as adults are more likely to come home and commit another crime and be rearrested than youth who stay in the juvenile system. Youth should not be charged as adults and sent to adult jails and prisons. If City Council and the Mayor are serious about providing opportunities and support to young people and ending the school-to-prison pipeline, they should stop sending young people to adult jails and stop spending so much money on holding people in jail pre-trial. The City should not use its money to build prisons but should be directing funding to build alternatives to prison like good schools, recreation centers, libraries and rehabs.