

**Contacts:**

Heather Keafer, Director of Communications, City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services  
[heather.keafer@phila.gov](mailto:heather.keafer@phila.gov), 267-275-2637 (cell), 215-683-6012 (office)

Katy Otto, Juvenile Law Center, [kotto@jlc.org](mailto:kotto@jlc.org), 240-478-9387 (cell), 215-625-0551 x 128

**City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services Announces Use of Youth Court Card**

*The Department to encourage case managers and all providers who work with youth in care to promote this tool.*

**Philadelphia, PA** (May 28, 2019): Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS) announced this month that it will begin using a [youth-created tool](#) to help older youth in foster care participate in their court hearing. The tool consists of a youth empowerment card that helps young people know their rights as well as a court preparation form that walks youth through the steps of advocating for themselves in dependency hearings. Youth Fostering Change, a youth advocacy program housed at Juvenile Law Center, created the tool in 2017.

DHS Commissioner Cynthia F. Figueroa said, "The information provided in this tool elevates the voice of youth and provides clear direction for how they can play a role at court. It also helps those who work with youth provide guidance on the court process. What makes this tool powerful is that it was created by youth with experience in the child welfare system. We're grateful that Youth Fostering Change invested their time, energy, and talents to helping other youth improve their experiences."

To encourage the use of this tool, DHS is implementing an internal campaign which targets case managers, programs that serve systems-involved youth to provide this card to youth they serve. In addition to widely distributing hard copies, it will also use email and social media to encourage its use.

Quite often, young people are not given a voice in court proceedings that determine many aspects of their futures. Youth Fostering Change had several reasons for creating its court preparation project, with three clearly stated goals:

1. Increase court attendance and meaningfully engage youth in court by having youth speak first during hearings and creating multiple avenues for youth to participate.
2. Inform service providers, judges, and attorneys of the positive effects of having youth participate in court.
3. Gather information from youth about their court experiences and barriers to attendance and develop action steps to address them.

As we celebrate National Foster Care Month, the advocates and staff at Juvenile Law Center are pleased to see that Philadelphia's Department of Human Services will be providing this tool to all youth involved in the child welfare system. "We are really grateful to DHS leadership for making the commitment to

distribute our court preparation tools to all youth in our city's child welfare," said Marcía Hopkins, Senior Manager, Youth Advocacy Program and Policy at Juvenile Law Center. "We believe in the power of youth voice; when young people know their rights, they are able to be more meaningfully engaged in the entire court process and have a hand in shaping decisions that affect their lives."

####

#### **About Us**

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services is the county child welfare agency. We lead, support, coordinate and implement services to prevent and address child abuse and neglect; and operate juvenile justice programs for Philadelphia.

[www.phila.gov/dhs](http://www.phila.gov/dhs)

#### **About Juvenile Law Center**

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems.

Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit [www.JLC.org](http://www.JLC.org).