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**Delaware Youth Are Denied Voice in Court Proceedings  
Amid Wave of Justice Reform**

WASHINGTON, DC — The quality of defense counsel for children in Delaware remains deeply concerning even as the state makes significant headway on juvenile justice reform, according to a report released today by the National Juvenile Defender Center.

“The findings of this report underscore the importance of specialized lawyers for young people in juvenile court. Amid great progress, the justice system will continue to fail children and communities when it denies young people their constitutional right to strong representation,” said Mary Ann Scali, Executive Director of the National Juvenile Defender Center.

*Delaware: An Assessment of Access to Counsel and Quality of Representation in Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings* is based on interviews, observation, and research conducted by a team of expert investigators who analyzed Delaware Family Courts over a span of months. While promising practices have been implemented statewide, there is still a troubling absence of advocacy for youth both in and outside of the courtroom. Children are often needlessly pulled deeper into the justice system with little regard for the collateral effects of court involvement.

“Few children, if any, are given the opportunity to talk to a lawyer before their first appearance in court, where they face a potential loss of freedom,” said Scali. “Without a lawyer at their side, young people’s ability to have a fair voice in the proceedings is foreclosed.”

The report urges Delaware to address the pervasive racial disparities in the system; end practices that disrupt due process for children, such as holding court hearings via videoconference; and establish juvenile defense leadership and practice units to build a dedicated cadre of lawyers who specialize in the representation of youth.

Over two decades, the National Juvenile Defender Center has evaluated juvenile defense systems in 22 states. The purpose of assessments is to provide state leaders, justice stakeholders, and the public with a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and deficits of children’s defense counsel and offer recommendations tailored to the state to ensure the fulfillment of due process rights for youth.

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*The National Juvenile Defender Center is dedicated to promoting justice for all children by ensuring excellence in juvenile defense. Through community building, training, and policy reform, we provide national leadership on juvenile defense issues with a focus on the deprivation of young people’s rights in the court system. For more information, please visit our website at [www.njdc.info](http://www.njdc.info).*