



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Youth-Led Coalition to Close Texas' Youth Prisons Will Gather at State Capitol

Finish the 5 Coalition to Host Rally and Advocacy Day on January 10

AUSTIN, TX – On the opening day of the Texas Legislature's 2023 session, a group of young people, formerly incarcerated organizers, advocates, and organizations will gather for a rally and advocacy day. The event is hosted by the Finish the 5 Coalition, which is advocating to close Texas' inhumane youth prisons and instead invest in kids and communities. More information is available on the [event registration page](#).

"It is evident that incarceration does not make communities safer, nor does it help rehabilitate youth," said Krupali Kumar, co-founder and youth organizer for the Austin Liberation Youth Movement (ALYM). "In fact, these youth prisons are inherently violent and exacerbate incarcerated youth's trauma. We need a new model, one that focuses on transformative justice, healing, and community care. Only then can justice truly be restored."

The [Finish the 5 Coalition](#) was founded in fall 2022 after reports from the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD)'s Independent Ombudsman and [reporting](#) by the *Texas Tribune's* Jolie McCullough highlighted widespread human rights violations for the children incarcerated in Texas' 5 state secure youth prisons. Children were locked in their rooms for up to 23 hours a day and forced to use water bottles and food trays as makeshift restroom facilities. Nearly half of the children incarcerated in TJJD were at risk of suicide, and some had already self-harmed. TJJD is currently under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice.

"The abuse and neglect I experienced in a Texas youth prison as a teenage girl still haunts me," said Jennifer Toon, founder of Lioness: Justice Impacted Women's Alliance, and Mental Health Peer Policy Fellow with Coalition of Texans with Disabilities. "Almost thirty years later I am appalled and outraged that despite 'reforms' nothing has changed. In fact, it's gotten worse."

The Finish the 5 Coalition seeks to raise awareness about incarcerated kids' living conditions while advocating for a slate of legislation during the 2023 legislative session. They demand that Texas leaders: **shut down TJJD's 5 facilities by 2027** through a thoughtful, staggered closure plan; **invest in building communities' infrastructure** to appropriately address the needs of children who would have been sent to TJJD, and allow recapture from closed facilities to reimburse the costs for community-based resources; and **enact policy reforms that decriminalize youth**, diverting children from the youth punishment system altogether. These demands, along with a history of juvenile incarceration in Texas, are available in more detail in the [Finish the 5 policy brief](#) published last year by the Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE), one of the Coalition's co-founders.

"No human can be expected to grow and change within an institution that refuses to do the same," said Elle Johnson, youth organizer with ALYM.

"Since its inception in the 19th century, Texas' youth prison system has gone through the same pattern every few years—scandal, public outcry, undersized legislative reform—and again, the system is racked with crises," said Alycia Castillo, Director of Policy and Advocacy with the TCJE. "After more than 100 years of failing Texas' most

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vulnerable kids, drastic change is long overdue. No ‘reform’ short of ending the heinous practice of incarcerating children and committing to support youth and their communities, *in* their communities, will suffice.”

Event details are below. Press is welcome and encouraged to arrive at 9:15am. With questions, please contact Madison at mkaigh@texascje.org or Krupali at krupalikumar@gmail.com.

WHO: The Finish the 5 Coalition, a group of Texas youth, impacted people, advocates, and organizations working to close Texas’ youth prisons

WHAT: Rally and advocacy day including speakers, distribution of campaign materials, and visits to legislative offices

WHERE: Texas Capitol, 1100 Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701

WHEN: January 10, 2023 | 9:00am - 12:00pm

9:15am – Welcome and speeches (South gate)

10:00am – Press conference with youth and impacted speakers (South gate)

10:30am – Healing circle (open-air rotunda)

11:15am – Legislative office visits (various)

12:00 – Legislators gavel in to begin 88th Session

WHY: To raise awareness, advocate for legislative action, and uplift leadership from youth and impacted Texans

LINKS AND OTHER MATERIALS:

- Event details and registration [[Eventbrite page](#)]
- “Finish the 5: Our Journey to Zero Youth Prisons in Texas” [[policy brief](#)]
- Finish the 5 Coalition demands and background [[flier](#)]
- Finish the 5 campaign hub [[webpage](#)]

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The Finish the 5 Coalition advocates to close Texas’ 5 youth prisons, invest savings in communities, and decriminalize children. Founded by youth, people incarcerated as children, and advocacy organizations, the Coalition fights to support the state’s most marginalized children outside of the carceral system. Founding organizations include Austin Liberation Youth Movement, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, and Texas Center for Justice and Equity.