The Equity Project is an initiative to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in the justice system are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. The Equity Project examines issues that impact LGBT youth during the entire delinquency process, ranging from arrest through post-disposition.

Core activities of the Equity Project:

- Gathering information from stakeholders about LGBT youth in the justice system
- Identifying obstacles to fair treatment
- Reporting findings
- Crafting recommendations for juvenile justice professionals

**Project Partners**

**Legal Services for Children**

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**National Center for Lesbian Rights**

www.nclrights.org

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**National Juvenile Defender Center**

www.njdc.info

1350 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 304
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Precise information about the numbers of LGBT youth in justice systems nationwide is not available, partly because youth are socialized to hide their identities for their safety. However, LGBT youth are disproportionately represented among youth who are at risk for juvenile justice contact.

Risk factors that increase the likelihood of juvenile justice contact for LGBT youth:

- Homelessness and runaway status, after youth are kicked out or flee domestic abuse by family members unable to accept the youth’s gender identity or sexual orientation
- Involvement in survival crimes such as theft and prostitution
- Violence and harassment in school, causing LGBT youth to skip classes, perform worse, and lower their aspirations
- Social isolation from the wider community, including some civic institutions and extended family networks
- High rates of depression, chronic stress, and substance abuse due to family and societal rejection

LGBT youth are also highly vulnerable once they enter the juvenile justice system. A few of the documented threats that face LGBT youth:

- Court and law enforcement officials’ lack of understanding about sexual orientation and gender identity issues
- Verbal, physical, and sexual abuse by staff and fellow residents in court-ordered placements
- Unnecessary use of isolation and segregation in confinement
- Inappropriate sexual offense charges arising from consensual same-sex conduct

Juvenile justice professionals desperately need more information, training, and resources to ensure that LGBT youth are treated fairly. LGBT young people have the same rights as other youth in the justice system, including: effective assistance of counsel, protection from harassment and harm, individualized disposition plans, and fair and respectful treatment. These rights are guaranteed by the federal Constitution and by state nondiscrimination provisions where applicable.

The Equity Project will craft recommendations for improving delinquency court proceedings based on the experiences and needs of practitioners and LGBT youth. We are collecting comments and stories from:

- Delinquency court judges
- Probation officers
- Juvenile prosecutors
- Juvenile defenders
- Juvenile justice agency and facility administrators
- Youth advocates
- Youth
- Parents of court-involved youth

Please contact us at info@equityproject.org for more information or if you have a story to share.

All remarks will be kept confidential.

“They treat me like I’m not human.”

– A transgender youth in the juvenile justice system