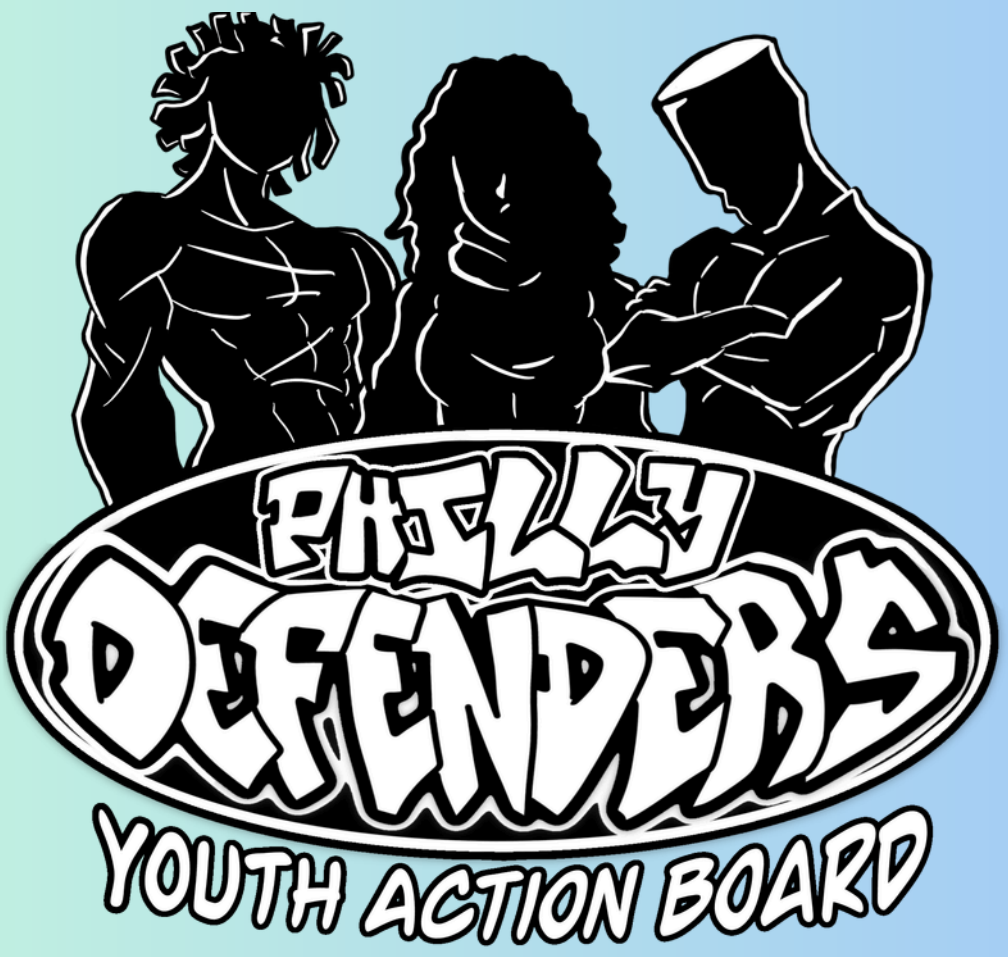

Your Voice Your Journey

A Survivor's Guide for System-Involved Youth

Created By Young Adults with Lived Experience in Foster Care & Juvenile Justice

Logo By: Hunter Rose/ @a.x.e.l.arts

Hi there,

If you are reading this, you may be involved in the foster care system, the juvenile justice system, or sometimes both. Being part of these systems can feel confusing, especially when you are hearing new terms and trying to understand how everything works.

You might hear words like **court hearings**, **case plans, probation,** or **case managers.** At times, it may feel like there are many people involved and many decisions being made. It can be difficult to know what everything means or what role each person plays.

This guide was created by young people who have experienced these systems themselves. It was designed to help clarify things and remind you that you are not alone in navigating this process.
Inside this guide, you will find information about who may be on your team, who you can contact if you need help, advice from young people who have been through similar experiences, and tips that can help you advocate for yourself along the way.

Most importantly, remember that your voice matters and deserves to be heard - Philly Defenders YAB.

Who's on Your Team

Assigned Judge:

Hearing Officer:

All Legal Team members are bound by confidentiality

Dependency Team

Child Advocate Attorney:

Represents your wishes and advocates for what you want in court.

Contact:

Child Advocate Social Service:

Helps identify your needs and supports your goals.

Contact:

Peer Advocate:

Provides support and guidance. This is a voluntary service.

Contact:

Juvenile Defense Team

Defense Attorney

Represents you in court and speaks on your behalf.

Contact:

Juvenile Social Services:

Connects you to programs and community support.

Contact:

*****Mandated Reporter*****

Some team members must report safety concerns to protect youth.

Probation Officer:

Monitors your compliance with court orders.

Contact: _____

CUA Casemanager/Supervisor:

Your direct worker, who coordinates services, ensures safety, and may testify in court.

Contact: _____

My Personal Supports family/friend

Family Member: _____

Trusted Adult: _____

Mentor: _____

Friend: _____

NUMBERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Legal Support
Philly Defenders - 215-568-3190
Support Center for Child Advocates
267-546-9200

Crisis Support
Suicide Prevention Hotline
Call or Text 988
Non-Emergency City Services
Dial 311

Housing & Youth Support
Valley Youth House
215-925-3180
Covenant House Pennsylvania
215-951-5411
Achieving Independence Center
215-574-9194

Complaints or Concerns
DHS Commissioner Action Response Office
dhscaro@phila.gov
215-683-6000
Office of Youth Ombudsperson
Tracie Johnson
tracie.johnson@phila.gov
215-685-6061

My Personal Contacts

AIC Coach: _____

Life Skills Coach: _____

Other Support: _____

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What I Wish I Knew

Be Open To Change

You are an advocate too; use your voice

You can request to speak to a judge privately in their chambers

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Don’t doubt your intuition; your experience matters

Your Voice Has Power, even if you feel it doesn’t

Give yourself flowers! you work hard

This is a chapter of your story, not the end

Give yourself Grace

Saying “NO” is a survival skill

Believe in your goals, even when others can’t see them yet

Never lose HOPE, it is your superpower

Always ask questions, because if you don’t, the answer’s always no

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Don’t forget, your team works for you!

Keep track of all court dates and meetings, so you can speak about your needs the best

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Best Practices

What you can do:

Ask clarifying questions, so you can better understand what is happening around you.

You can speak to your attorney **BEFORE** court to best understand what can happen at your hearing.

Keep a paper trail, if it wasn't written down, it wasn't said.

Remember:

Don't forget the chain of command; everyone has a supervisor.

Don't be afraid to ask for a new worker if the current one is not working out for you.

To make sure you have access to all of your vital documents before aging out.

You have the right to have your religious and personal boundaries respected.