Rights4Girls strives to make the lives of young women and girls a human rights priority.
Our Mission

Rights4Girls advocates for the dignity and rights of young women and girls so that every girl can be safe and live a life free of violence and exploitation.

Rights4Girls works to change the narrative and policies that criminalize girls who have been impacted by gender-based violence. We advocate for solutions that provide girls and young women with access to safety, healing, and support. We do so by centering the voices and experiences of our most marginalized girls to ensure that their lives are not only contemplated in mainstream conversations around justice reform and gendered violence, but that their needs are made a priority.

Our work includes youth engagement, public education campaigns, policy development and advocacy, research, training and technical assistance, and coalition building.

Rights4Girls plays a unique role in the field by:

- Engaging and empowering girls and youth to become powerful agents of change;
- Educating lawmakers and advocating for policy reforms that center the needs of marginalized girls and young women;
- Providing training and technical assistance to judges, systems professionals, and services providers to better respond to the needs of survivors of violence and exploitation;
- Launching public awareness campaigns that shift the narrative around girls impacted by gender-based violence;
- Conducting ground-breaking research and producing innovative reports to highlight the distinct needs of girls and young women of color; and
- Building partnerships with other youth-serving organizations and non-traditional allies to create a movement for girls’ rights.

Girls attending Rights4Girls youth forum on building awareness around child trafficking.
Protecting DC Girls

Our juvenile justice work and advocacy in Washington, DC is focused on reducing the number of girls and gender-nonconforming youth in the system and increasing community-based resources and programs for girls.

- Released a first-of-its-kind report showing that the percentage of girls entering the juvenile justice system in DC has risen dramatically, with young Black girls being disproportionately impacted.
- Launched the DC Girls Coalition, including a girls advisory council, together with Black Swan Academy to identify and respond to issues impacting DC girls.
- Supported local agencies in implementing legislation that ends the criminalization of child sex trafficking survivors, improves community-based responses and alternatives to detention, and builds the capacity of local agencies and organizations to serve trafficked youth.
- Provided advocacy training to sex trafficking survivors, including offering opportunities for them to advocate for themselves on policies that impact them and their communities.
- Offered testimony before the DC Council on the rights and needs of pregnant girls in juvenile custody, the harmful impacts of exclusionary school discipline policies on girls of color, and the importance of clearing trafficking survivors' criminal and juvenile records so they can move on with their lives free of the stigma of exploitation.
- Designed and implemented workshops for DC Public Schools on advocacy, school pushout, and the impact of violence against girls.
- Supported the community response to the “DC missing girls” by developing an online resource for young people and families of missing children and advised community-based organizations and agencies on the Mayor’s task force to address the needs of missing and vulnerable youth.
- Ensure that girls’ lives and needs are contemplated across multiple systems and spaces by sitting on various coalitions in DC, including the Youth Justice Project Coalition, the DC Coalition to End Sexual Violence, the Advisory Council for DC’s Young Women's Initiative, and the DC Human Trafficking Task Force.

Youth Advocacy Workshops

Our youth workshops in Washington, DC serve to engage, educate, and empower young people in the District to be their own powerful advocates for policy and systems change.

- Designed and conducted youth organizing and advocacy workshops on violence prevention and self-care, sexual violence and trafficking, restorative justice, and more to empower girls with the tools to advocate for themselves and other young women in their communities.
- Led "Life of Girls" workshop series, in partnership with the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative, to train and empower young women of color who have touched the justice system on how to advocate for social and systems change.
- Co-led the "Love Us. Don't Harm Us." workshop series, with our partners at Black Swan Academy to provide young people in our community with a safe space to discuss and organize around the issues that impact their lives such as community violence, safety, school pushout, and self-care.
No Such Thing Campaign

Rights4Girls launched the No Such Thing Campaign to make clear that there is no such thing as a “child prostitute”—there are only victims and survivors of child rape. Our award-winning campaign has not only succeeded in changing our language, but it has also changed our laws to protect minors from prostitution charges.

• Successfully campaigned the Associated Press to revise its authoritative Stylebook to instruct writers to avoid using the word “prostitute” when a child is involved since children cannot consent to sex—an important step towards changing public attitudes about girls who are victims of child sex trafficking.

• Succeeded in getting the LA County Sheriff’s Department to announce a commitment to ending the arrest of all children under the age of 18 on prostitution charges in LA County—the largest county in the country—and instead connecting trafficked girls to services in lieu of detention.

• Passed the “No Such Thing” law in September 2016, rendering all minors under the age of 18 in the state of California immune from prosecution for prostitution and prostitution-related offenses. The law went into effect in January 2017, protecting thousands of trafficked youth in the state of California.

• Leveraged the campaign to successfully pass laws in Pennsylvania and Georgia ending the arrest and prosecution of child sex trafficking victims for prostitution and related offenses.

Reforming Systems to Center Vulnerable Girls

Rights4Girls has long advocated for improved system responses to young women and girls—particularly girls in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems—to ensure that our girls are free to live out their full potential without fear of violence or exploitation.

• Co-founded and facilitate the Girls at the Margin National Alliance—the largest national coalition of girl-serving organizations and advocates in the country with over 200 local, state, and national organizations reaching across disciplines and systems to address root causes of the complex issues confronting girls and young women at the margin, including family and community violence, sexual abuse, racism, poverty, and other forms of adversity.

• Serve on the National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the US, where we advise the Attorney General and the Secretary of the US Dept. of Health and Human Services on how to improve our national response towards child sex trafficking.
• Serve as national experts on the Core Advisory Team of the National Girls’ Initiative, where we advise the US Dept. of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention on best practices to reduce girls’ involvement in the juvenile justice system and ways to improve conditions of confinement for girls inside the system.

• Serve on the Advisory Council of DC’s Young Women’s Initiative and provide expertise on all issues related to gender-based violence, girls’ juvenile justice involvement, and child welfare.

• Provide subject matter expertise on girls as a member of several national and local coalitions across diverse spaces such as sexual assault, juvenile justice, child welfare, human trafficking, domestic violence, and children’s rights, to ensure that girls’ lives are contemplated and that their needs are prioritized.

Technical Assistance & Advocacy

Training Judges
Through our partnership with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), we train juvenile, tribal, and general jurisdiction judges across the country on recognizing the signs of domestic child sex trafficking in their courtrooms and ways in which they can better serve this population without relying on punitive measures.

• Designed and implemented the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Child Sex Trafficking—an intensive two-and-a half day curriculum for judicial officers offered several times a year nationwide.

• Serve as expert faculty in judicial trainings on implicit and cultural bias, historical trauma, how to disrupt the abuse to prison pipeline, and judicial engagement from an intersectional, victim-centered lens.

• Conduct trauma assessments of courts to ensure that they are not re-victimizing survivors of violence and their families through the court process.

Educating Lawmakers
Rights4Girls educates lawmakers on ways to improve our policies for young women and girls. We believe that when policies are improved for girls, the impact is sweeping and generational.

• Developed and passed at least eight bipartisan federal laws that together support the safety and well-being of millions of girls, young women, and vulnerable children.

• Testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the importance of passing juvenile justice reform for girls and survivors of violence who are criminalized for their victimization.

• Helped pass legislation in DC to end unfair school disciplinary procedures that harm girls of color and prohibit the secure detention of status offenders, a practice that significantly impacts girls who have experienced sexual violence.

• Advocated for improved conditions of confinement for girls and women behind bars, including ending the harmful practice of shackling pregnant women and girls in correctional custody. These efforts have led to the inclusion of anti-shackling language in every major criminal and juvenile justice reform bill introduced in the House and Senate—ensuring our justice reform efforts have a gender lens.

Equipped over 400 judges across the country with the tools to serve vulnerable girls instead of relying on detention and incarceration—a change that will impact thousands of young women and girls each year.

Engaging a bipartisan group of US Senators to declare that there is “no such thing as a child prostitute” and that our laws must treat all survivors as victims of crime, not as offenders.
Research & Reports

Over the last several years, Rights4Girls has conducted intersectional research and produced a series of critical reports shedding light on some of the most pressing issues facing marginalized young women and girls.

The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls’ Story

Rights4Girls released this groundbreaking report with our partners to tell the untold, hidden narrative of girls in our broken juvenile justice system. The report received national acclaim and has continued to shape the field’s understanding of women and girls’ incarceration in this country.

The report maps key points in the pipeline—the detention of girls who are victims of sex trafficking; the criminalization of abused girls who run away from home or become truant; and those who cross over from the child welfare system into juvenile justice—to create an understanding of how marginalized girls are unfairly punished after their experiences of sexual and physical abuse.

Survivor Protection: Reducing the Risk of Trauma to Child Sex Trafficking Victims

Together with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, our report examines why child sex trafficking victims are given less protections in court than other victims of child abuse and gender violence.

Our Survivor Protection report analyzes gaps in state and federal laws that fail to protect child trafficking victim witnesses and describes ways to extend existing courtroom protections afforded to other victims of child abuse, to survivors of child sex trafficking who testify at trial.

Beyond the Walls: A Look at Girls in DC’s Juvenile Justice System

Rights4Girls and the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative produced this first-of-its-kind report exposing girls’ increased contact with DC’s juvenile justice system.

Our report discovered that i) while boys’ arrest rates have steadily fallen, girls’ arrests have increased 87%; ii) Black girls are arrested at rates 30x that of white boys and girls; iii) 97% of incarcerated girls in DC are Black; iv) 86% of arrests of girls are for non-violent offenses; and v) 60% of girls arrested in DC are under age 15.

I Am the Voice: Girls’ Reflections from Inside the Justice System

Rights4Girls, together with the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, released a compilation of visual and written work by girls in the juvenile justice system.

Our compilation seeks to lift up the voices of girls in the juvenile justice system by publishing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without censorship. The booklet is grounded in our belief that we must center the voices and lived experiences of girls when advocating for policies that directly impact their lives.

DOWNLOAD THESE RESOURCES ONLINE http://rights4girls.org/resources/