

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/he-has-a-name/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Around the country, youth in foster group homes, juvenile detention centers, and prisons are testing positive for the coronavirus. Some places have seen riots, with kids running away from facilities because they are afraid of being infected in one instance they were tear-gassed. These children are being placed in 20-hour-plus solitary confinement for their own protection, but in unventilated cells that often have not been cleaned properly. Children can have no family visitors, and their educations are on hold. Putting kids in lockdown is not keeping them safe or controlling the spread of infection. Staff, probation officers, and others are testing positive and bringing the coronavirus into confined spaces. Meanwhile, terrified children are hiding any symptoms they may have to try and avoid isolation. Those who are put in solitary suffer the emotional and psychological consequences.

Last week, [25 out of 38 girls tested positive for COVID-19 in Michigans largest child welfare organization](#). New York, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Missouri have also reported a rise in cases in group homes. This week, the [Sentencing Project](#), which has been closely monitoring juvenile facilities across the U.S., reported at least 506 staff in 30 states, and at a minimum 441 youth across 24 states, DC and Puerto Rico tested positive.

One tragic case in Michigan is gaining national attention: Cornelius Frederick, a Black 16-year old boy who was fatally restrained after throwing a sandwich and went into cardiac arrest. Cornelius became unresponsive and was later transported to the local hospital in Kalamazoo where he tested positive for the virus before dying. Nearly 40 other children and 9 staff members at the facility have tested positive since Cornelius death. [USA Today](#) reported on his case and spoke with our executive director, Sandy Santana:

Group homes are often not the answer in normal circumstances. Many of these facilities are rife with physical and sexual abuse, and now they're breeding grounds for this disease, as well. And when you do try to separate kids for social distancing, it can feel to the kid like isolation and abandonment, which compounds their trauma.

Fredericks death has sparked an uproar among the online community and advocates with a call to shut down the Lakeside Academy and other for-profit facilities, with calls for #JusticeForCornelius. His death is a heartbreaking reminder of the dangerous conditions children have been living in for decades in places like Lakeside Academy. Cornelius was one of the thousands of young people in need of mental health support who struggle each day in Americas broken foster group homes.

COVID-19 has put their suffering into stark relief. And it has led to a broad bipartisan movement to release youth held in detention. A [survey conducted in April](#) by the Justice Collaborative institute showed a strong bipartisan majority of voting Americans support for stepping up to protect kids. 60 percent support releasing juveniles whose sentences end within the next six months, including 54 percent of Republicans. 58 percent of voters prefer early release to solitary confinement conditions imposed on juveniles during a pandemic, including 50 percent of Republicans.

Cornelius was a healthy, sweet rambunctious boy who deserved a better fate.

We must do more to protect children like Cornelius from abuse and neglect and now is not the time to pause. **We must demand that the health and safety of our children are prioritized.** We will continue to fight to reduce the population of detained youth and return them to their families and family settings. It is the best solution we have for keeping them healthy and giving them the chance to heal from the mental anguish they have suffered.

[Join us and add your voice to tell policymakers its time to send our children home.](#)

Yesterday, three staff members at Michigans Lakeside Academy were charged with the killing of Cornelius Frederick, after two of them put their weight across his chest and abdomen, and a third failed to perform CPR and waited for another 12-minutes to call for medical assistance. Several of the children who witnessed the events recalled Cornelius cries of I cant breathe.

Cornelius scream of I cant breathe was not enough to get the staff members to stop the excessive restraint, the lawsuit said.

Last week, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services delivered a [63-page report](#), recommending that the academys license is revoked after finding 10 violations, which included a failure to follow rules related to restraint and discipline.

[Three Charged in Death of Michigan Teenager Restrained at Youth Academy](#), NPR, June 25, 2020

[3 Childrens Home Staffers Charged In Death Of 16-Year-Old](#), New York Times, June 24, 2020

[Governor Whitmer Statement on Youth Death at Lakeside for Children in Kalamazoo](#), The Office of Governor Gretchen Whitmer, June 20, 2020

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