

DRI Releases a Juvenile Justice Rights Guide

Life as a teenager is harrowing enough without having to worry about individual rights. That's why DRI Staff Attorney Emily Ehlers created a self-advocacy guide with the purpose of helping youth in detention centers, and their families, navigate the confusing circumstances that might surround a stay in a detention center. The guide is entitled *Moving Forward: Your Rights, What to Expect, Where to get Help*.

Over the past six months, Ehlers visited 9 detention facilities in Iowa to talk to youth about their rights and self-advocacy. She developed the guide to respond to their questions and got input from detention center staff about what youth needed to better understand their experiences.

"It's not revolutionary literature," Ehlers said. "It lets youth and their families know what their legal rights in detention are, and how rights differ from privileges."

The guide details such topics as how to file a grievance, laws regarding restraint and seclusion, civil rights, education, how to talk to their lawyers, journal keeping, and additional resources. The sections about education and how to properly file grievances were suggested by detention center staff so that children in detention can learn and be a part of the process.

"Kids in detention can feel powerless. They ended up in circumstances where they feel like their voices don't matter because all of the decisions are being made by adults. Their voice still matters in detention, and this will help them know how to advocate for themselves," Ehlers said.

Ehlers will ask that detention centers hand the guide to all who enter their facilities, and their families. The opening page is a letter to parents and guardians about when to expect and how to empower themselves to ask questions.

If you would like copies of the guide, please contact DRI at info@driowa.org. You can also access the guide on DRI's [website](#).