**

*[Insert your address]*

*[Insert date]*

***‘Not my crime, still my sentence’***

Dear Ms. / Mr. [Insert name of your contact],

We are writing to bring to your attention the impact that having a parent in conflict with the law can have on children and the pivotal role that the police force of [insert your country] can play to protect the needs and rights of these children.

An estimated 2.1 million children are affected by the imprisonment of a parent in Council of Europe countries. This figure does not include those impacted by events that precede imprisonment, namely the arrest, which can be a highly traumatic event for children.

Those who have witnessed a parent’s arrest are 73% more likely to experience post-traumatic symptoms than their peers who have not.[[1]](#footnote-1) From the eyes of a child, the removal of a parent by the police in what can be unexpected, stressful, chaotic, or even violent circumstances can provoke feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, shame or guilt. Many children report, even years later, that their mistrust and fear of the police stemmed from the arrest of a parent. When not provided with adequate support, children who have a parent in conflict with the law may be exposed to a greater risk of social exclusion, discrimination, stigma and increased poverty, in addition to the anxiety and pain of separation from a primary caregiver.

The role that police can play in safeguarding these children is paramount. A child-focused approach to policing not only directly protects and benefits children themselves but positively impacts the wider operational goals of harm reduction, community engagement and public trust in the police. We call upon [name of organisation/police force] to be a part of this change. In 2018 the Council of Europe’s landmark piece of legislation*[[2]](#footnote-2)* outlined 56 guidelines for good practice concerning children with imprisoned parents. One such guideline is the following:

*“Due consideration should be given by the police to the impact that arrest of a parent may have on any children present. In such cases, where possible, arrest should be carried out in the absence of the child or, at a minimum, in a child‐sensitive manner.”*

Removing children from an arrest scene, designating one officer to explain the situation in age-appropriate language, listening to the child and communicating that the parent will be safe, can do an immense amount to mitigate the potentially traumatic impact of an arrest on children. We call upon police forces to enact the following changes:

* **Trauma-informed officer training** from recruitment onwards that sensitises officers to children’s emotional needs
* **Child-centred arrest procedure** before, during and after an arrest to ensure police activity at first does no harm and secondly is active in supporting children
* Robust **systems of identification** and **data collection**
* **Collaboration** with other agencies across the sector to protect children’s needs and rights.

No child should be treated differently because of the actions of a parent. Yet many rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union are not fully enjoyed by children with a parent in conflict with the law. [Insert name of your organisation] is a member of COPE, the pan-European network which works to ensure that the rights of children with parents in conflict with the law are fully respected and that meaningful action is taken to protect their well-being and healthy development.

The following material contains many more examples of good practice, recommendations, practical tools and guidelines to assist police forces in creating meaningful action to meet the needs and rights of children with parents in conflict with the law:

* Briefing paper: [The impact of parental arrest: ensuring the safety and well-being of children of parents in conflict with the law](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Police_Briefing_Final_WordPDF.pdf)
* Toolkit: [Working with the police to safeguard children with a parent in conflict with the law](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/working-with-the-police-to-safeguard-children/)
* [It's Time to Act: CoE Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/its-time-to-act-cm-rec20185/)5
* [Implementation Guidance Document: Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/implementation-guidance-document-council-of-europe-recommendation-cm-rec20185/)
* [Police, Judges & Sentencing, Arrests, Trials & Children's Rights](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/special-edition-justice-for-children-of-prisoners-newsletters/)
* [European Journal of Parental Imprisonment: Child impact assessments and sentencing](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/european-journal-of-parental-imprisonment/)

Does this issue speak to you? Is this relevant to your work? We are open to exchange and further discussion; please feel free to get in touch with us for more information and an idea of what steps to take next.

If you can, please consider donating to COPE [here](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/make-a-donation/). A donation to COPE would allow for, amongst other things, the translation and therefore wider dissemination of our materials and resources that encourage the protection of children’s rights and needs. This would significantly increase the scope of their impact.

[Insert fundraising information for your organisation as you wish]

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your signature]

[Insert your name]

[Insert your function]

[Insert the name and website of your organisation]

1. Phillips, S. D., & Zhao J. (2010). ‘The relationship between witnessing arrests and elevated symptoms of post traumatic stress: Findings from a national study of children involved in the child welfare system’. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32 (10), 1246-1254. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.04.015.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning children with imprisoned parents (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 4 April 2018 the 1312th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). Accessed at: [https://childrenofprisoners.eu/council-of-europe-recommendation-cm-rec20185](https://childrenofprisoners.eu/council-of-europe-recommendation-cm-rec20185/)/   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)