

Dustin Hoffman
c/o New York Civil
Liberties Union Foundation
84 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

November 1, 1976

Dear Fellow New Yorker:

Willie Patton, 10 years old, was abandoned by his mother in 1969 and shunted for the next six years between foster homes and hospitals without proper medical care. Because he was denied the diet he required for homocystinura, a rare disease, he has suffered irreparable brain damage.

NYCLU stepped into the case when we learned that Willie was living in a nurse's office at Bellevue--the only in-patient in the pediatric metabolic unit--without schooling or remediation. Without even a toy.

Although Willie was labelled "unadoptable" for seven years, just weeks after NYCLU filed suit--Willie was adopted. NYCLU's suit continues for monetary damages from the public and private agencies which permitted this outrage to occur.

Few people think of the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) in these terms. Few are aware of our unwavering efforts on behalf of children, or mental patients or migrant workers. The abridgement of their rights--however fundamental--is of no direct concern to most. These are not headline making cases, and people who have been sated on Watergate and government spying may have lost sight of the fact that the fight to maintain civil liberties is a long fight, and must be fought on many fronts if we are to win.

Children's rights have been "swept under the carpet for decades," to quote Earl Warren. 50% of the children presently languishing in institutional warehouses--juvenile centers and detention homes--never committed an offense more serious than truancy, or running away from an alcoholic and abusive parent. 2% are confined for "the use of vile language"--all acts that would not be considered a crime in an adult. A disproportionate number of children behind bars are poor and non-white.

It costs taxpayers \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year to institutionally store a child--\$10,000 to \$20,000 to place a child on a path that will ultimately lead to another arrest or early death. It costs a lot less to save a child like Willie Patton or the thousands of others who are abused, neglected, exploited or brutalized in gross violation of their Constitutional rights. But without your support NYCLU may not be able to continue to defend those rights or any of the other civil liberties you take for granted.

Since 1973, NYCLU has been working to establish the rights of children through dozens of individual court cases. . . their rights to a stable and permanent family. . .

(over, please)

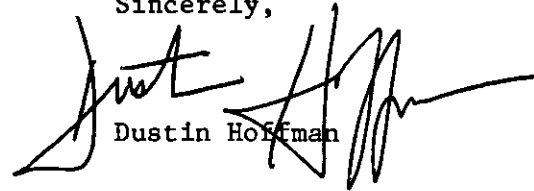
to legal representation. . . to foster care only as a last resort and as a temporary measure.

NYCLU is facing a financial crisis that threatens to take the teeth out of our efforts and to undermine hard won gains. For two consecutive years we have failed to meet budget, with a resulting cut in staff and programs--in critical litigation. The economic recession which hurt the poor, the minorities, the socially disadvantaged the most, also hurt the agencies which protect their interests the most.

Civil liberties cannot be a luxury only good times can afford. We ask you to join with us now with a contribution of \$25--\$50--\$100--\$1,000 whatever you can as soon as you can. Your tax deductible contribution will put NYCLU on retainer to protect your individual rights in good times and bad. . . whether you are personally threatened or not.

A retainer is your guarantee that NYCLU will always be there--a force for freedom. Unless you act now with a generous check today, we may no longer be around when you need us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dustin Hoffman', written over the printed name.

Dustin Hoffman