

## Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee Hearing

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### “The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act”

Good morning members of the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee. I am Anne Marie Ambrose, the Director of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Services at the Office of Children Youth and Families in the Department of Public Welfare for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to represent Pennsylvania as well as juvenile justice administrators and advocates on the critical importance of the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A).

The JJDP A has been critical in supporting juvenile justice system improvement and for delinquency prevention. The establishment of Pennsylvania’s State Advisory Group (the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee) within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in 1978, has provided tremendous leadership and commitment to improving the juvenile justice system and to provide a consistent focus on delinquency prevention.

This important work has been accomplished over the past several years primarily because of the strength of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (JJDP C). We are appointed by the Governor without regard for political affiliation but based on experience, expertise and dedication in the field of juvenile justice.

Our committee is composed of judges, probation officers, researchers, youth and victim advocates, defenders, district attorneys, practitioners, community leaders, providers and educators.

We have the best and brightest engaged in intensive discussions and planning to create a framework for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention goals for Pennsylvania youth and families.

Pennsylvania has a proud history of full compliance with the core requirements of the JJDP, which include: Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (with a particular emphasis on the special needs of girls), Jail Removal, Sight and Sound Separation, and Disproportionate Minority Contact. The Core Protections have all been longstanding goals of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system.

We believe in the fair, humane and just treatment of all youth in the juvenile justice system. We believe that all youth have the promise and potential to be productive citizens through our juvenile justice mission of Balanced and Restorative Justice.

In the early 1990's high violent juvenile crime rates raised concerns as to the effectiveness of juvenile justice system intervention. Out of these concerns, Act 33 of Special Session No. 1 was passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in November 1995. Act 33 amended Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act to provide that, consistent with the protection of the public interest, the purpose/mission of the juvenile justice system is...

*"to provide for children committing delinquent acts programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation which provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community."*

The new purpose clause in the Juvenile Act is rooted in the philosophy of “balanced and restorative justice,” which gives priority to repairing the harm done to crime victims and communities and which defines offender accountability in terms of assuming responsibility for the harm caused by his/her behavior and taking action to repair that harm to the extent possible.

In response to recommendations presented to the Governor in 1997 by the JJDPC, the Commonwealth has developed a strong juvenile justice and delinquency prevention infrastructure that has helped to make Pennsylvania a national leader in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.

In 1998, the Committee adopted a mission statement and guiding principles for Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system in order to guide the operation of the system and shape system policy.

The JJDPC meets quarterly and submits a plan to the Governor every two years. The JJDPC Subcommittees meet quarterly as well to drive the work and make recommendations in critical priority areas such as female services, evidence-based prevention and intervention practices as well as disproportionate minority contact.

The JJDPC in coordination with PCCD’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has administered federal funding under the JJDP Act to advance overall juvenile justice system improvement and for delinquency prevention.

Through the years our committee has used the goals of the JJDP Act and critical federal funding as a springboard for juvenile justice reform that has become a national model.

Title II funds have supported a broad range of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention projects and this has been the most stable federal funding source over the last several years.

These funds have focused on 4 main areas: compliance monitoring activities to maintain compliance with the federal JJDP Act, addressing the issue of disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system, implementing model delinquency prevention programs and overall juvenile justice system improvement efforts.

The Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) Program was created to encourage state and local governments to hold delinquent youths responsible for their offenses through accountability-based sanctions.

Local units of government have been able to use these funds covering the entire spectrum from entry-level diversion programs such as Youth Aid Panels to Intensive Aftercare services for sex offenders.

Title V funds under the JJDP Act have been used to support sustainability efforts for Pennsylvania's Communities That Care (CTC) initiatives. Title V funds support projects that were developed and implemented through the efforts of CTC risk-focused Prevention Policy Boards at various locations throughout Pennsylvania.

The CTC initiatives help to sustain community collaboration and prevention/intervention programs that create safe places for children and youth, reduce problem behaviors among children and youth, and teach children and youth healthy beliefs and clear standards.

Title V funds under the JJDP Act were used to launch Pennsylvania's CTC Risk-Focused Prevention Initiative in 1994 and CTC is still a critical prevention planning process used by many communities around the Commonwealth.

Devastating cuts in federal funding over the last few years have forced the committee to reevaluate our work and focus even more on prevention as well as sustainability of programs.

Through the leadership of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (JJJPC) and its system partners, Pennsylvania continues to be a model for the nation in its approach to preventing and appropriately responding to delinquency. The combination of state leadership and vision with local autonomy and innovation is the strength of our system and future progress will depend on continued commitment and leadership.

Key priority issues targeted for improvements are:

1. Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Practices
2. Disproportionate Minority Contact
3. Aftercare
4. Behavioral Health

Pennsylvania is considered a leader in juvenile crime prevention.

Since 1998, PCCD, through the leadership of the JJJPC, has funded over 160 model prevention/intervention programs with a combination of federal and state funds.

The JJJPC has used much of their federal funding over the years to invest in evidence-based prevention/intervention programs such as Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, Functional Family Therapy and Multisystemic Therapy.

In the absence of any good research that establishes that public safety is enhanced by prosecuting juveniles in adult court or placing them in institutions, Pennsylvania has invested in supporting youth and families in their communities.

In order to build on our current prevention efforts and build more in-state capacity, planning is underway to develop a Resource Center for Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Practices.

The overall purpose is to support the proliferation of high quality and effective juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs throughout Pennsylvania. We want to improve and promote Pennsylvania's knowledge of effective juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs and practices by advancing recognized standards of research for determining program effectiveness.

Funding will support the start-up and operation of prevention or intervention programs proven to be effective, and ensure Evidence-Based Program models are implemented with fidelity and adherence to quality assurance standards. PCCD's OJJDP will serve as a resource to the field related to the implementation of evidence-based programming as well as support local innovative intervention programs designed to achieve the juvenile justice system goals of community protection, offender accountability, and competency development to ensure all programs meet a minimum threshold of quality and effectiveness.

A vital part of the overall initiative will be collaborating with all state agencies on planning and programming related to juvenile delinquency prevention and the reduction and prevention of violence by and against children.

Another key aspect is supporting providers and probation departments in documenting their activities so that programs/departments can track their performance and report their outcomes in a standardized way that would ultimately support research into what programs work best with which offenders / respond to community risk factors.

As you will hear on this panel, these interventions are both cost-effective and have proven outcomes. Important resources like the Resource Center for Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Practices require stable federal funding to succeed.

In 2003, the JJDPC priorities became the foundation for our work with the MacArthur Foundation's "Model for Change" Initiative.

Pennsylvania was the first state selected to participate in the "Models for Change" initiative supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Pennsylvania was chosen due to its favorable reform climate and seems poised to become an exemplary system.

Having a strong State Advisory Group like the JJDPC, was a key factor in Pennsylvania's selection and due to strong partnerships among state stakeholders-judges, district attorneys, public defenders, community leaders, and city, county, and state officials.

The partnership with the MacArthur Foundation has been critical in advancing the JJDPC's priorities in seeking to promote broad juvenile justice system reform in the areas of aftercare, mental health services, and disproportionate minority contact.

Pennsylvania believes in keeping children and families together whenever possible and using the least restrictive intervention necessary. We have implemented Performance-based Standards (PbS) launched by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA) and supported by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to insure quality care in juvenile correctional facilities for youth who require secure confinement but believe that most youth should be served in the community if possible.

The Department of Public Welfare has created an Integrated Children's Services Initiative to bring together all child-serving

systems in an effort to make appropriate planning decisions. The juvenile justice system should only be for youth who pose a risk to the community and require ongoing court supervision.

Education, mental health and families working together with probation can identify appropriate diversion resources to meet the mandates of Balanced and Restorative Justice. Federal funding is needed to stabilize and expand this innovative practice.

Pennsylvania's SAG, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee have helped to create a model juvenile justice system. In 2005, of 45,504 delinquent dispositions, only 3487 youth are placed in out of home care.

Much of our good work has been built around the core protections for children found in the JJDP. Those protections should be maintained and strengthened through the reauthorization. Our work has been made increasingly difficult because of significant cuts in funding.

OJJDP should be charged with not only holding states accountable for adhering to the goals of the JJDP but for providing technical assistance to states in order to achieve those goals. Incentive funding should also be made available for states that are able to demonstrate the ability to create innovative and effective local initiatives that provide treatment to youth involved in the juvenile justice system while keeping communities safe.

OJJDP should be responsible for measuring outcomes in states that receive federal funding. Positive outcomes for youth, families and communities must be achieved in order to maintain and increase federal funding.

I hope that I have been able to communicate the critical importance of reauthorization of the JJDP. It has helped create a synergy in Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system that recognizes the need to

provide the opportunity for redemption for our troubled youth while valuing the importance of community protection and the community's critical role in achieving youth redemption.

Our reform efforts would not have been possible without federal funding that was available over the last several years.

In order to sustain our progress and continue to make critical investments in prevention, including evidence-based programs, we must receive additional federal funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this very important issue. I encourage Congress to not only support but also strengthen the JJDP. My written testimony includes references to additional information on juvenile justice issues. Please use these resources and continue to promote policy that values and supports all of our youth. [I am happy to answer any questions you might have regarding my testimony.](#)