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April 24, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Specter:

On behalf of the 60,000 pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists of the American Academy of Pediatrics, I would like to express our thanks for your work on improving the lives of children who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. The Academy strongly supports S. 678, the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2009*, a bill to reauthorize and strengthen this important program for child health and well-being.

The majority of children in the juvenile justice system enter with diagnosable mental health conditions. Many of these children will have had exposure to abuse and neglect, substance abuse, and sexual abuse. It is for these children, who need care the most, that care is hardest to obtain. The justice system must seek alternatives to incarceration whenever practicable and place these children in necessary treatment rather than lock them up. When detention is necessary, juvenile justice systems must offer comprehensive mental health screening to identify those in need of mental health services. These services, then, must be expanded and strengthened to meet the needs of those with identified conditions. By attending to the mental health care needs of these children, we can help reduce juvenile delinquency, keep children with their families, and avoid unnecessary incarceration.

Although the majority of teens arrested and detained are males, the numbers of teen women arrested have increased. Studies indicate higher rates of reported sexual abuse, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy compared to those teens not arrested. For these young women, involvement with the judicial system may be the only opportunity to have both a medical and mental health evaluation with appropriate diagnoses and initiation of treatment for a variety of disorders including depression, anxiety, substance abuse and/or posttraumatic stress disorder.

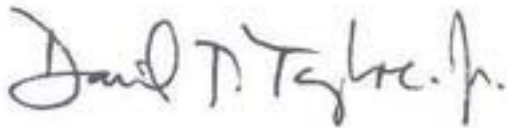
S. 678 will strengthen the four core protections offered in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). The bill will bolster efforts to deinstitutionalize status offenders (juveniles charged with offenses that are not crimes for adults), decrease contact between children and adults in detention facilities, and reduce the disproportionate number of minority children in the system. It will improve conditions of confinement for juveniles, offer additional mental health and substance abuse services during incarceration and upon reentry into the community, and place an increased emphasis on prevention and alternatives to detention.

In particular, the incentive grants offered in S. 678 will ensure the proper

implementation of diversion and treatment programs for juveniles with mental health and substance abuse conditions. These grant programs will help train juvenile justice professionals in assessment, diversion, and referral; establish state-level partnerships of mental health and juvenile justice authorities to implement diversion and treatment programs; and develop collaborative plans to address the needs of juveniles at risk of entering the juvenile justice system. State will be required to develop details for their plans for implementing screening, assessment, referral, and treatment programs for juveniles with mental illness. It is essential that federal juvenile justice funds are spent on cost-effective, evidence-based programs to improve the mental health of children. We would, however, like to see further emphasis placed on the unique needs of girls in the juvenile justice system.

Thank you for your dedication to the health and well-being of children. We look forward to working with you and the committee to successfully reauthorize JJDP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David T. Tayloe Jr." in a cursive style.

David T. Tayloe Jr., MD, FAAP
President

DTT/mdm

cc. The Honorable Dick Durbin
The Honorable Herb Kohl