



Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission

535 West Jefferson Street, 3rd Floor • Springfield, Illinois 62702

Telephone: 217-557-2109

Facsimile: 217-524-5586

Dear Governor Quinn and Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

On behalf of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission (IJJC), the duly appointed body charged with advising the state on juvenile justice matters, I am compelled to write to express our deep concern over proposed cuts to Illinois' community-based substance abuse, mental health and youth services. Of greatest concern are the proposed cuts to programs serving children involved in the juvenile justice system and those at risk of justice system involvement. Not only would these funding cuts endanger public safety and reverse any progress the state has made in expanding rehabilitation services to young offenders and those at risk, they would almost certainly require increased expenditures on law enforcement and court services and result in the incarceration of more juveniles, which is the most costly, least effective option we have.

There is no question that our state is in dire straits financially and that difficult choices must be made. Cutting these services is not the answer. In fact, evidence of the wisdom in investing in effective substance abuse and mental health services could not be more clear or compelling: programs that improve the well being of youthful offenders and young people at significant risk for offending save the state money and are one of the most cost effective investments the public sector can make. For example:

- Ending the criminal career of one 14-year old could save up to \$5.3 million overall (Cohen and Piquero, 2008)
- Studies show that effective diversion programs can save as much as \$42,000 per participant when costs incurred by victims of crime are factored in (Aos et al., 2006).

In recent years, Illinois has made significant strides to expand the availability of rehabilitation, treatment and youth services. As a result, from 2000 to 2007, Illinois saw the following:

- 11 percent decrease in youth age 10-16 admitted to secure detention;
- 14 percent reduction in youth committed to Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice Youth Centers;
- 29 percent decrease in delinquency petitions filed (FY97-FY07);
- 30 percent reduction in students dropping out of high school (Illinois Collaboration on Youth, 2010) and
- 52 percent reduction in IDJJ commitments from the Redeploy Illinois Sites (Redeploy Annual Report 2009).

Despite the progress that has been made, the need for effective community based services remains great. These proposed budget cuts are also at odds with the laudable goal of the Juvenile Justice system to advance "a culture change from a punitive approach toward a rehabilitative, treatment-focused model of care that engages families, promotes public safety, and holds youth accountable for their actions while providing better services for young people in facilities and after release." Community and mental health services for justice involved youth are already underfunded in comparison to services for adults. With relatively inexpensive interventions that draw on existing community-based services, youth in the juvenile justice system can be served more effectively and diverted out of the system.

We are proud of Illinois' legacy of being at the forefront of juvenile justice beginning with the creation of the first juvenile court in 1899, founded with the recognition of the high rehabilitative potential of the young people. The Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission urges you to not veer from that path by cutting the very treatment and rehabilitation services so essential to making the aspiration of juvenile justice a reality.

Sincerely,

Hon. George Timberlake
Chair, Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission

References:

Aos, S., Miller, M. and E. Drake (2006). "Evidence-based public policy options to reduce future prison construction, criminal justice costs, and crime rates." Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Illinois Collaboration on Youth (2010) Issue Brief

Chicago Metropolis 2020 (2006) "Crime and Justice Index," Available at <http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org/documents/2006CrimeandJusticeIndex.pdf>

Cohen, M. and A.R. Piquero (2008) "New Evidence on the Monetary Value of Saving a High Risk Youth." *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 25:25-49.

Cusick, G., George, R.M. and K.C. Bell (2009) "From Corrections to Community: The Juvenile Reentry Experience as Characterized by Multiple Systems Involvement." University of Chicago, Chapin Hall.

Greenwood, P. (2008) "Prevention and intervention programs for juvenile offenders." *The Future of Children*, 18(2): 185-210.

Justice Policy Institute (2009) "The Costs of Confinement: Why Good Juvenile Justice Policies Make Good Fiscal Sense," Washington, D.C.

Teplin, L.A., Abram, K.M., McClelland, G.M., Dulcan, M.K., and A.A. Mericle (2002) "Psychiatric disorders in youth in juvenile detention." *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 59: 1133-1143.

Teplin L.A., Abram K.M., McClelland G.M., Washburn J.J., and A.K. Pikus (2005). "Detecting mental disorder in juvenile detainees: who receives services." *American Journal of Public Health*, 95:1773-1780.