

Written Testimonies
Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs
810 7th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531

Wednesday, December 6, 2023
1:00 – 4:00 PM

Secretary Vincent Shiraldi
Maryland Department of Juvenile Services

Thank you to the Coordinating Council for this opportunity to speak about juvenile justice at a national level, and the role that the federal government can play in this particular moment. Today, we are at a crossroads in juvenile justice - faced with critical decisions to make about whether we can push forward with what we know is both effective and just, or if we allow political momentum to reverse decades of progress.

In 1995, Princeton Professor John Dilulio famously coined the term “superpredator,” asserting that there was a growing number of children and adolescents who were “super crime-prone” for whom committing violent crime was “what comes naturally”. This theory did not simply predict that the number of young people committing crimes would increase, but rather that there was a new breed of youth for whom violence was inherent to their nature - suggesting that these youth are not worth saving, and in fact it’s not possible to save them.

Not long after Dilulio made these claims, however, juvenile crime began falling precipitously, clearly contradicting his predictions. The concept of the “superpredator” was entirely false, and Dilulio acknowledged as much himself just a handful of years after creating the term.¹

But the damage had been done. Nearly every state in the country passed new legislation pushing more kids into adult courts and exposing them to extreme sentences such as life without parole. Nationally, the impact of those law changes resulted in 109,000 youth in juvenile facilities and 10,000 youth in adult prisons by 1999, numbers that were unheard of by our own and international standards. Juvenile jails and prisons were bursting at the seams, and rife with violence and abuse. Between 1990 and 2011, “systemic or recurrent maltreatment” was documented in 32 states, plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.²

The damage that all of this caused for a generation of children is incalculable, but this punitive turn wasn’t felt equally by all groups of young people – youth of color, particularly Black youth, were locked up highly disproportionately - even for similar crimes and with similar prior records.

After the “superpredator” idea was debunked, localities and states did try to right the ship. Between 1995 and 2019, youth incarceration declined by 70% nationwide.³ There have been intentional efforts to shift the system away from punishment and towards rehabilitation, to reduce the number of kids coming into the system, especially via the school to prison pipeline, and to address the significant problem of racial disparities in how youth are treated.

Additionally, research on the adolescent brain emerged, showing how much ongoing development occurs during adolescence and into the mid-twenties. Effectively using science to prove just how wrong the superpredator theory really was, researchers were able to show that adolescent brains are highly malleable. It turns out that young people's personalities are hardly fixed, as the "superpredator" theory claimed, and youth are in fact capable of incredible change. This evidence informed a number of landmark Supreme Court decisions from 2005 to 2016, which banned the death penalty for minors, life without parole sentences for children convicted of non-homicide offenses, and automatic sentences of juvenile life without parole (JLWOP) for youth convicted of homicide.

During this reform era, while the number of youth incarcerated nationwide was falling, the country was also experiencing an enormous reduction in juvenile crime. Ironically, one year after the idea of the "superpredator" was thrust into the public consciousness, juvenile arrests began to plummet: dropping by 80% between 1996 and 2020.⁴ This substantial decline in juvenile crime alongside a substantial decline in juvenile incarceration gave the lie to the notions upon which mass incarceration of juveniles was built.

But now, almost 30 years later, I fear the "superpredator" concept is starting to rear its ugly head again. Although kids account for a miniscule percentage of crime everywhere in the country, over the last two years juvenile crime has become a major focus in the media. A new, yet familiar, narrative has taken hold that kids are running wild, that they are primarily to blame for violent crime, and that the juvenile legal system is too lenient.

While some categories of serious juvenile crime have increased since 2020, these increases are coming from a period of historic lows. That is not to minimize the concerns. Any increase in violent crime, whether perpetrated by young people or adults, should be taken seriously. But if we are not careful in terms of how we respond to what's happening, we will make the same mistakes of the past - mistakes that were not only harmful to young people and communities but were also bad for public safety.

And we are already seeing this happening. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), by August 2023, detention populations were 65% higher than they were in March 2020. This is despite research that shows that secure detention can actually increase the likelihood that young people will reoffend in the future.⁵

Unsurprisingly, youth of color are disproportionately affected by rising detention rates. While racial disparities have always been a problem in the juvenile justice system, the data show that during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, disparities got even worse. According to the AECF data, the number of Black youth held in detention on a given day increased by 20% from March 2020 to August 2023, while the number of white youth in detention decreased by 14% during the same time period. Before the pandemic, about twice as many Black youth were in detention on a given day as white youth. By August 2023, that had increased to almost three times as many Black youth as white youth.

These increases in the use of detention are concerning, given everything we've learned over the past 30 years about the harmful impact of incarceration on young people, and because of the dangers that come along with crowded facilities. But it's especially concerning when we see that,

as detention populations rise, racial disparities are not only persisting - they're getting worse. It's critical at this point in time that the federal government intervene to prevent a worsening crisis and further erosion of the progress made over the past 30 years.

While the role of the federal government in the administration of juvenile justice is limited, the problems we are facing are happening at a national level, and the federal government does have an important role to play in leading the conversation about how the country as a whole should respond to what is happening in juvenile justice right now.

In many states and localities across the country, concerns about juvenile crime are causing elected officials to point the finger at specific local or state level decision-makers and reforms. In my state of Maryland, law enforcement and politicians are asserting that increases in violent crime are the result of recent legislation that, among other things, raised the minimum age of prosecution for nonviolent offenses, and protects young people from being coerced into waiving their Fifth Amendment rights. Setting aside the obvious logical flaws in these claims, including the fact that kids account for a tiny percentage of violent crime, it's hard to understand how laws specific to the Maryland juvenile justice system could be responsible for an increase in violent crime here, while states all over the country that have not passed similar laws are seeing very similar trends.

The bottom line is that there is simply no evidence to support theories that recent increases in violent crime are the result of juvenile justice reform, "progressive prosecutors" or lenient judges, or any specific piece of legislation, as opposed to something like the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the entire country in significant and lasting ways.

The federal government has an opportunity now to use its immense resources and bully pulpit to send a message across the country that we must move forward, not backwards, and avoid making the same mistakes we made decades ago. The federal government has the power to convene stakeholders and hold hearings to start a national level conversation about what's really happening with regards to youth crime, what we can do about it, and why we must stay on the course of progress in juvenile justice.

The federal government can put forth a national road map for the country to achieve better outcomes in juvenile justice - defending good policy from roll backs and advancing additional reforms that can actually make a positive impact on youth crime rates, such as increasing investments in restorative justice and credible messenger programming.

And each of your agencies individually can ensure that your own policies and practices don't create unnecessary barriers for system-involved youth that make it harder for them to get the resources they need to develop into healthy, productive adults who do not end up in the criminal justice system.

Specifically, there are a number of ways in which the Department of Education can ensure youth in the juvenile justice system have access to a quality education in and outside of juvenile facilities, and that schools are not pushing youth out of classrooms and into detention cells. To that end, the DOE should ensure that schools inside of juvenile facilities (both pre and post-adjudication) are adequately funded and held accountable to providing the educational services that youth are entitled to. This means that the Department would support and hold state education agencies

accountable for ensuring that local school districts and/or juvenile justice agencies fund, staff, and resource schools on par with community-based schools. But it also means holding school districts and juvenile justice agencies accountable for important educational benchmarks such as attendance, credit accumulation, and state level testing results, and youth are provided with real, substantive classes and coursework that are aligned with local school district standards.

The DOE can also ensure that students returning from confinement have access to appropriate, high quality schools by prohibiting schools and school districts from refusing students from returning to their previous school, funneling them to alternative schools, or requiring them to attend 'virtual' schools - absent clear, fair reasons like a valid imminent threat to safety of the school or staff.

And on the front end, we need more investment in youth who are disconnected from school. Students who fail or stop attending 8th or 9th grade are at high risk of never graduating and becoming system-involved. The DOE can support innovative schools and support programs that offer these students meaningful opportunities to re-engage with and find success at school, which will help to keep them out of the jj system, and get them on track to graduate.

We also need help from the Department of Labor to ensure workforce development opportunities are available to more youth in the juvenile justice system. The Department can clarify more explicitly in the Reintegration of ExOffenders Program that grants for justice system-involved youth are intended to reach all system-involved youth, not just the reentry population. The frequent use of the terms "reentry" or "reintegration" suggests programs are only for youth who have spent time in correctional facilities. This often prevents youth who are or have been on probation, or who were diverted from deeper system involvement from accessing these designated "reentry programs." In addition to not emphasizing "reentry" and "reintegration", I would suggest changing the name of the program, as the term "ex-offender", is both narrowing and dated. These programs could be a more powerful tool to prevent deeper system penetration and incarceration for all justice-involved youth, not only to foster reintegration for the small number of youth who are released from confinement.

The DOL can also encourage and approve state Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) waiver requests that incentivize local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to serve justice system-involved youth in their youth programs. Such waivers are needed to counter the many disincentives to serving this population built into the WIOA system, including performance measures, eligibility determination, documentation requirements, and cost-per-participants standards.

Finally, the Department can provide more explicit guidance to state and local WIBs on how to overcome the barriers to enrolling and serving justice-involved youth under the WIOA youth program, as well as identify and promote best practices on how to collaborate with justice system partners and serve this population more effectively.

There are a number of things this collection of agencies can do to create more opportunities for justice system-involved youth so that we can help them find their way out of the juvenile justice system and towards a healthy, productive, independent future. But we can't do it if we are fighting against a backwards, dangerous narrative that threatens all the progress that has been made over

the past 30 years. It's time to take a stand and work together to promote an effective youth justice system, rooted in research and best practices, that avoids reactionary decision-making, and can withstand the winds of change over time.

1 See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/09/us/as-ex-theorist-on-young-superpredators-bush-aide-has-regrets.html>

2 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). No Place For Kids. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/no-place-for-kids-full-report>

3 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). Youth Incarceration in the United States. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/youth-incarceration-in-the-united-states>.

4 The Sentencing Project. (2023) Youth Justice By The Numbers. Washington, D.C., Retrieved from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/youth-justice-by-the-numbers/>

5 Walker, S. C., & Herting, J. R. (2020). The Impact of Pretrial Juvenile Detention on 12-Month Recidivism: A Matched Comparison Study. *Crime & Delinquency*, 66(13-14), 1865-1887. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720926115>

Susan H Badeau
Family Engagement and Trauma Expert, Author, Parent

Improving Outcomes by Listening to Families

Good afternoon. Administrator Ryan, Esteemed Council Members, Fellow Panelists, and guests, I am honored to be here today to talk to you about “Improving Access to Supports, Services, and Opportunities for Justice-Involved Youth and Youth at Risk of Justice Involvement” from the specific perspective of parents and other family members. In other words, I am here to represent the voices, strengths and needs of the parents and family members of the half a million children who cycle through the youth, or juvenile, justice system each year. While this number is down significantly since I started my journey as both a parent and advocate in the early 1980’s, it is still far too many children and families whose lives are torn apart and traumatized by their encounters with a deeply fragmented approach to ensuring both child and community safety.

My name is Sue Badeau and although I currently live in an RV traveling the country, I raised my children primarily in New England and Pennsylvania. In addition, I been part of several local, state, and national family organizations for the past 45 years and have traveled the country listening to the voices and life experiences of parents and other family members of justice-involved young people for decades, up to and including within the past 6 months when I interviewed family members as part of my consulting role with OJJDP’s Youth and Family Partnerships Workgroup. I will do my best to bring their varied and diverse experiences, concerns, and recommendations to life, together with my own experiences, in the few moments I have with you today. I should also note that I have worked professionally in youth justice, child welfare, mental health, and education over the course of my 40-year career, so naturally my professional experiences – always seen through a family lens – will be interwoven with my remarks today.

I first became a parent-figure to teens in the justice system when I was barely out of my own teenage years. At the age of 23, I was hired, along with my husband, to be the group home parents to 6 youth in Vermont who were labeled, at the time, as “Level D” kids which meant that they were dually adjudicated dependent and delinquent. Over the next 4 years we cared for more than 23 youth at that group home and then we continued parenting children who had both child welfare and youth justice system involvement as foster parents for the next 25 years, and we generally had always at least 6 teens in our home and care during that period. We went on to permanently adopted 20 of these youth, who, together with our two birth children, became our permanent family. Today we have over 40 grandchildren, many of whom are teens, so we stay closely connected to what is happening in the lives of young people today and how challenging it is for parents to find help or support when one of their children is struggling.

Every one of the young people we ever called son, or daughter, whether for a few months or for a lifetime has taught us something, has enriched our lives and has had a different story. Every parent I have met whether in Seattle or Albuquerque, New York City or rural Missouri or my home states of Vermont and Pennsylvania, whether in the 1980’s, 90’s, 2020s or last month has a different story. And yet from this tapestry of diverse and unique stories some common themes

emerge, and in these themes, I find the answers I would propose to the two questions you asked of me today:

- How might [Council member agencies](#) enhance coordinated service to prevent youth from entering the justice system?
- How might [Council member agencies](#) coordinate to increase access/remove barriers to opportunities and services that support the success of justice-involved youth in their communities?

As a way of framing these themes and recommendations, I would like to begin by sharing the story of one of the first youth who was placed in our care back in 1983. This young man who I will call “Paul” was presented as “a delinquent, a runaway, and a thief” who had a “history” of shoplifting and theft. When his “case” was presented to us, no one mentioned his talent playing guitar. No one mentioned the recent loss of his beloved grandfather. No one mentioned that he had “run-away” to escape an uncle who was sexually assaulting him on a regular basis. No one mentioned that the items he had “shoplifted” were always food-items and there was no discussion of the possibility that he and his family may have been suffering from hunger and chronic food insecurity. No one mentioned his brilliant sense of humor.

Even as young 20-something newbies in this work we could see that Paul had unmet health care needs and clear mental health challenges. He was on an IEP which had last been updated three years and four schools earlier and had no relevance to his current circumstances. He wanted to return home to his family after completing the program but that was complicated by the fact that his family had no home for him to go to – after years of struggling with housing insecurity, shuttling from the home of one relative to another (including the abusive uncle) his mother and younger sister were living in a homeless shelter. In the documents we were given about Paul, his mother was described at turns as “disinterested,” “hostile,” “resistant to treatment” and “uncooperative.” It also stated that she did not care about her son and had no ability to focus on his best interests. Yet, when we got to know her, we saw none of these characteristics. Rather we saw an exhausted, depressed, beaten-down woman who desperately loved her children and felt defeated by every system she had turned to over the years for help. We were at first skeptical, and then appalled and then angry as we learned her story and saw the evidence of years of doors being closed in her face – if ever opened at all - as she sought to provide safe housing, appropriate health and educational opportunities and mental health care for her family.

At this point you may be thinking, “Sue, that’s a nice trip down memory lane, but why are you telling us a story from 1983? This is 2023. Surely things are different now.”

I wish that were the case. So let me tell you about Gigi, who lives in Philadelphia. I last spoke to her in October of this year. She had just been evicted from her apartment and her phone was soon to be turned off. She had a plan to seek refuge in one of Philadelphia’s many homeless shelters. Gigi grew up in foster care herself, experiencing at least 12 different placements before she turned 18. She has a profound trauma history and severe mental health needs and cognitive disabilities as well as a significant speech impediment. She was raped in the stairwell of her middle school when she was twelve years old. At the age of 18 she had her first child, and she was fiercely protective of this adorable little baby. But love was not enough and as hard as she

tried, she was not able to provide safety and stability, education, and mental health care over the years, so her daughter also ended up in foster care for a time before “graduating” to the juvenile justice system. Like Paul and his mother 40 years earlier, Gigi and her daughter had been connected to multiple systems, and yet somehow had fallen through the cracks of all of them.

Debbie, one of the moms in Pennsylvania that I interviewed this fall - a parent herself, but also the leader of a support group for parents and grandparents raising their grandchildren – told me that in her experience, “by the time it gets to juvenile justice, a family has probably touched 12 other systems along the route to get there.”

So, what could have helped keep Paul out of the juvenile justice system 40 years ago, and prevented Gigi’s daughter from entering it in 2023? And what would it take, even if they entered the system, to have helped them heal, grow, and thrive rather than sustain loss upon loss and go deeper and deeper into the justice system? The answers are startlingly simple to describe and yet astonishingly difficult to implement and sustain. I am going to offer three concrete recommendations that revolve around the following five themes:

1. Families love their children and want them to be safe and thriving in all life domains.
2. Problems that start in one domain (for example, trauma, health concerns, loss of housing, or special educational needs) often are connected to problems in other life domains.
3. Families who seek help often get misdirected or fall through the cracks because they have “come to the wrong place” for the kind of help they need – focusing on housing rather than mental health, or transportation rather than education. They may not know where to turn when their needs are multiple and varied and system providers look at them only through a narrow, tunnel-vision lens. If they are not eligible or in need of the specific support a particular agency can provide, they are turned away with no support at all. When families can get the right supports at the right time, justice involvement will significantly decrease.
4. Children thrive best when they are securely attached, economically secure, safely housed, well-fed, receive the right kinds of health and education, experience a sense of connection and belonging in their family and community and have crisis supports to cope with grief, loss, and trauma.
5. Children and families thrive best when all these services and supports are provided by people they can relate to and connect with – people representative of their community, culture, and values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a National Family Information and Peer Navigation Clearinghouse, with State Affiliates Families need easily accessible, comprehensive, reliable information developed by families, for families about accessible, developmentally, and culturally appropriate, trauma-informed wholistic services when they need help. Information provided by real people, with their own lived experience, who can walk them through the process.

In the early years of our own parenting experiences, we found it incredibly frustrating to find out how and where to get services when our children had medical, educational, or mental health

needs. As the years have gone by, I have gained vast education and experience and even a national reputation. Yet to this day when I try to help one of my now-adult children navigate the confusing eligibility requirements, funding obstacles and other barriers to getting the needs of themselves or their children met, I want to pull my hair out. I frequently turn to one of my fellow momma-warrior advocates and say, “If it is this hard for me, how in the world can a new young parent with less education and support possibly navigate this mess?”

Communities and states have initiated many efforts to create information clearinghouses and peer-navigator systems for families. Justice-system focused peer navigator programs in New York, Washington State, Ohio Louisiana, and New Mexico among others are excellent examples, but there is still a need for an over-arching, federally funded umbrella that drives consistency, excellence, and sustainability for these programs. Two of my favorite examples are the federally funded and family-led Family-to-Family Health Information Centers and the state Parent Information Centers for families of children with special educational needs. A similar system of fully funded and family-led centers for families of youth who are involved in or at risk for justice system involvement would go a long way to fill this gap OR concrete directives to and funding for the existing centers named above to ensure that they include information and peer navigation for justice-involved families. My friend Debbie in PA reminds me of work she did for justice involved families as part of System of Care grants in her Pennsylvania county 10 years ago. And yet, the same robust, personal, comprehensive supports no longer exist today – the system exists in name or on paper only. She laments, “It's amazing how much we seem to keep working in circles. Everything we did 20 years ago, then 10 years later, we do it again. 10 years later, we do it again. It's frustrating.” The Coordinating Council through its member agencies could really make this happen. Such a clearinghouse/peer navigation system needs to include information and access to supports across multiple life domains ranging from safe affordable housing, to transportation, to jobs for youth as well as their parents, to education and particularly special education supports, community and culturally based mental health & trauma services as well as legal system information and supports. This effort would answer BOTH questions on the table today, helping prevent entry as well as supporting successful outcomes and reducing re-entry for system-involved youth and their families.

Institutionalize Leadership Roles for Families– I am pleased to see that there are a couple of the citizen/practitioner members of this Council who have lived experience within the youth justice system. I trust that your voices, experience, and expertise are of tremendous value to the Council as a whole. A dozen years ago when I worked as a fellow here at OJJDP we asked for 2 of the 9 practitioner slots to be designated for persons with lived expertise, specifically one for a young adult and one for a parent or family member. Unfortunately, this recommendation has not been implemented so while the current Council does have some lived-expertise present – although I am not sure a parent or family voice is included - there is no guarantee that future Councils will. It is critical that the voices and expertise of both youth and family members can guide, shape, and respond to the policy issues and other matters that come before the Council in a consistent and valued manner. This would also set an important example of providing meaningful leadership roles for families on governing and policy-setting bodies which would hopefully lead to more leadership, power-sharing opportunities for families across the country.

Work Together to Address Individual and Collective/Historic Trauma

In addition to our role as group-home and foster parents to youth who had justice system involvement, 3 of our “forever” sons also have experienced time in both the youth and adult criminal justice systems, as well as two of our grandsons. In each and every case, some combination of individual and collective (historic/multigenerational) trauma was at the root of the behaviors that led to their encounters with the justice system. This experience is not unique to my family. Again and again families share with me stories of how their son or daughter was devastated by the effects of deep trauma wounds and grief – the sudden loss of a grandparent or best friend, surviving a violent assault, a school shooting or ongoing bullying, being terrorized by experiences in a homeless shelter – before becoming involved with the justice system. This Council and its members are uniquely situated to promote and ensure funding for community-based, culturally and developmentally-informed, effective, affordable, and accessible trauma responsive services for all youth and families. Embracing recommendations by both Georgetown and NCTSN in their recent publication “A Trauma-Informed Guide for Working with Youth Involved with Multiple Systems” is a good place to start. Yet even this publication falls short of recognizing the need to engage and partner with the parents and family members of the young people in ongoing and meaningful ways. A more robust and family-focused approach is critical and would be an appropriate role for this Council to support with your unique opportunity to influence policy, funding, and practice guidelines.

SUMMARY

Families love their children and want them to grow up strong, healthy, happy, and thriving. Sometimes achieving this goal is complicated by a wide variety of factors including special health, mental health or educational needs, trauma, socio-economic factors, parental stress or the normal ups and downs of adolescent behavior. When families need help, they often don’t know where to turn and often their calls for help for their children are unheard until the challenges escalate and rise to the level of justice system involvement. By this time, families have so many systems and case managers in their lives, they are often confused and frustrated. The Coordinating Council has a unique vantage point to use your “bully pulpit” and available leverage to enact significant steps that would ameliorate these challenges and in so doing help prevent many children from entering the justice system and prevent others from going deeper into the system. The three top recommendations I am putting forward today include:

- Establish a National Family Information and Peer Navigation Clearinghouse,
- Institutionalize Leadership Roles for Families,
- Work Together to Address Individual and Collective/Historic Trauma

I hope that these suggestions are helpful to the Council. Thank you for your time and attention today.

Angela Chang
Hamilton County Public Defender

Re-imagining Safety

I recently had to prepare a young person to spend time in youth prison. I had been representing him for nearly a year. His mother worked a good job but the hours were third shift, so she was often gone at night and caught up on sleep during the day. He had a number of younger siblings that also needed her attention. My client had an individualized education plan and a history of mental health struggles, but by the time we met, he had not been in any services for a number of years. He wasn't sure about his school enrollment status and had fallen through the cracks months before he was arrested. He was held in detention for about a month, where he could not access mental health services because due to insurance issues, none of the available mental health providers could start therapy while he was in detention. With the support of some court intervention and our holistic defense team, we were able to get him released on electronic monitoring. However, the path to success was riddled with challenges. First, he needed to get a diagnostic assessment, which was difficult to schedule due to his mother's work schedule. Then the first few therapy referrals fell through because of waitlists. His mentoring program was delayed due to his mom's schedule and the intake process. It took weeks to get him enrolled in school. His mother forgot the therapy intake appointment. By the time he was enrolled in school, we had lost all momentum and he had spent weeks cooped up in his house on electronic monitoring. Just a week or so before his scheduled trial, he had new charges and ended up being adjudicated of charges that that included mandatory prison time. At his disposition, his mother expressed heartbreak and disbelief at how quickly we got to this point- her oldest child was going to be sent away to youth prison for two years. "I failed," she wept.

The truth is, the entire system failed. When my client needed therapy and intensive attention in school, he did not get it. He was pushed out of school for disciplinary issues instead of getting counseling. When his mother had to keep her job and there was no other way for my client to get transported to treatment, he just did not get treatment. Even once he became involved with court, there were waitlists, appointments that required his mom to take off work, confinement at home, and a lack of places near his home to get a job. They lived in a neighborhood in Cincinnati that was not within walking distance to any of the services he was expected to engage in. And nothing was available to address the fact that my client was one of many young people who felt the only way to be safe and in control was to possess a firearm. When I left court the morning he was sentenced, all I could think was, "We failed." Again. The system of reactive measures we take in the juvenile legal system do not work to prevent contact with the system, and too often fail to support the success of the youth who do enter the system.

As a youth defender who has been representing young people and working toward youth justice for more than a decade, I have had the honor of getting to know the stories of hundreds of youth in my community. While each of these children are unique, the barriers to safety and thus, success, are virtually universal. The majority of the youth that I represent are black and brown even though people of color make up about a third of the county's population. Their neighborhoods are the most policed and do not have safe, affordable, and stable housing. Their neighborhoods that either have no safe places for children to go outside of school, or the safe spaces lack the funding to support

all the children in need in that community. Existing after school programs do not have enough funding to accept all the youth who wish to attend. Existing community organizations focus on a few issues but there is no collaboration among providers and county services to address needs holistically. Most of the youth I work with have special education needs, and nearly all of them have experienced school pushout. Instead of wrapping kids in need with more intensive support services and individualized attention, our under-resourced schools use school discipline and school police to manage behavioral concerns. Put in another way, current resources focus on responding to unwanted behaviors, rather than in supports to prevent that unwanted behavior in the first place. Of course, this is how kids end up meeting youth defenders like me.

Once youth are court-involved, they are required to engage with treatment services that typically require commuting outside of their neighborhood, that are often not culturally competent, and are often not individualized. Youth who have court-ordered treatment often struggle with transportation to and from services, as most of them rely on the local bus system. Their parents and guardians are often overwhelmed by a number of other concerns: jobs, evictions, needs of other siblings, and their own mental health needs. When supporting compliance with court orders becomes difficult, parents and guardians often rely on the court system to impose further consequences and sanctions. Significantly, due to long case-processing times, often caused by the proliferation of bodyworn camera, many months pass between the incident bringing a child to court and the services provided at disposition. The needs that resulted in the court contact to begin with often go on unaddressed for too long. Again, the reactive system is ineffective.

To better understand how member agencies can enhance prevention and support system-involved youth and move away from a reactive system, looking at the experiences of youth in two vastly different local communities might be illustrative. In Hamilton County, a child that lives in the Blue Ash community will experience contact with the juvenile court system very differently than a child that lives in the Avondale community. In Blue Ash, the schools are located close to where the students live. There are a variety of housing options. There is a large park with a lot of recreation space, restaurants, and an adjoining apartment complex. There is community recreation center. There are many businesses that support employment. There are multiple grocery stores within a short driving distance at all price points: Aldi, Kroger, Trader Joe's, and Whole Foods, to name some. There are multiple smaller organizations offering behavioral health services. The schools have a partnership with the Cincinnati Children's Hospital and a non-profit that specializes in mental health solutions between schools and local organizations. There are ample intervention specialists and access to therapists at school. There are very few children referred to juvenile court from Blue Ash, and when they are, it's easier to advocate for release and community-based dispositions when support is so accessible.

By contrast, the Avondale neighborhood is served by the Cincinnati Public School district. Avondale has two elementary schools in the neighborhood and a community recreation center, but there is no high school in Avondale. Because of the school lottery system, students from Avondale may be bussed all over the city for school and spend hours each morning and afternoon commuting on the Metro Bus system. Avondale has historically been subject to redlining: many of the local businesses left years ago and did not return. One of the major affordable housing complexes was the subject of a lawsuit due to horrific conditions (including mold and sewage backups) as recently as 2019. There is no local grocery store: after many years in the making, one is just now about to

open in a newly developed town center. There are very few restaurants. Getting mental health services through the nearby Cincinnati Children's Hospital is not easy- there is typically a long waitlist. While mental health services theoretically available in schools, students are often charged with crimes for behaviors within the school and also subject to suspension and expulsion, making consistent access to these services difficult. Avondale is a neighborhood that is heavily policed. It should be no surprise that many youth in Avondale are subjected to frequent police contact and wind up in the juvenile court system. Because it's difficult to coordinate needs for a child, securing pre-trial release and community-based disposition is more difficult for a child facing serious charges. Even with a holistic defense approach, there are many barriers to support- many stemming from the lack of support services located where a child lives. There are a number of local, youth supporting organizations in Avondale that just need the resources to expand the amount of support they can provide to youth in their community.

Ultimately, the barriers I've discussed center around what makes a child feel safe. Children must be safe in their communities to thrive and be successful. Their parents and guardians must also be adequately supported to ensure safety. True safety is achieved when communities have the necessary resources for children to thrive. Counsel member agencies must direct resources to strengthen the most impacted communities to transform them into places where children can thrive. System players resort to the tools that are available. For decades, our country has channeled the majority of our resources into the tools of policing, surveillance, family separation, and incarceration to create an idea of safety. None of these tools have actually created safety for the children in our most impacted communities. It's time to create new tools that are informed by the lived experiences of those most impacted by the juvenile legal system.

Since 2018, my office has worked to create, with the support of OJJDP, a holistic defense practice that helps address the needs of youth that we represent. We have two social workers and a mitigation specialist, and partner with the Children's Law Center to address civil legal needs. We have been successful in reducing detention time and keeping more youth in the community. This holistic approach has also revealed just how significant the gaps are in all the youth-serving systems: delays and barriers in obtaining treatment, school disruptions caused by detention, transportation challenges, just to name a few.

We have seen how just putting resources in to support a holistic youth defense model has improved the outcomes of many youth, and I invite Council member agencies to imagine how shifting resources from the traditional service delivery models to support more neighborhood-based, culturally appropriate, and rapid service delivery models. Bringing resources directly to the youth who need them will ultimately create safer communities and reduce the number of youth who end up involved in the legal system.

I respectfully submit the following recommendations to the following member agencies. While the below recommendations are made for individual member agencies, the member agencies should consider collaborating to create community centers at the neighborhood level in the most system-impacted communities to provide one-stop services to youth and families, and also providing support and incentive to prioritize training and employing local individuals with similar lived experiences as the youth in the community. Additionally, member agencies should prioritize funding programs that support interagency collaboration to reduce the stress of children and

families who must navigate multiple systems and services. Finally, the communities being served should be consulted on how services and resources are delivered to their neighborhoods.

Department of Justice & OJJDP:

- Shift a portion of the funding and resources that are currently funneled to law enforcement, incarceration, and other reactive programming models towards programming models that are community based, hyper-localized, and provide streamlined and rapid response behavioral health services.
- Enforcing existing standards set for carceral systems and policing to reduce overuse and misuse of these system, thus freeing up resources for more preventative services.
- Provide more funding to youth defense, the only part of the reactive system that is dedicated to protecting youth and advocating for their rights, to support holistic defense models and strong advocacy.

Department of Education

- Support schools provide more counselors, social workers, intervention specialists, free meals, extra-curriculars, and after-school activities.
- Support schools in providing quality education to youth in detention centers and enforce educational standards in facilities where youth are incarcerated.
- Incentivize creation of more of the above support services in schools over the use of school policing.
- Incentivize the equal distribution of resources to neighborhood schools in large urban school districts so children can access quality education and needed services where they live, thus reducing transportation barriers to treatment, sports, and recreation.
- Encourage individuals that wish to pursue careers in the above education-related roles through financial support and training.

Department of Health and Human Services:

- Support free and accessible community-based healthcare and behavioral healthcare.
- Support service delivery models that utilize technology or have neighborhood based operations to provide expedited intake processes and quick access to health care and mental health services.
- Incentivize connecting families involved with social services to local support services over sending children away from families to treatment facilities.
- Provide training to enhance social services workers' understanding of how to support youth who are involved in both the social services and juvenile court systems.

Department of Housing and Urban Development:

- Ensure housing is environmentally safe.
- Invite in other governmental agencies to create communities with easy access to food, transportation, education, medical services, workforce development, etc.;
- Eliminate bans on housing for youth with delinquency charges/adjudications.
- Support civil legal service agencies that can advocate for families in housing crises.

Department of Agriculture:

- Support free school meals.
- Eliminate food deserts by partnering with council member agencies to bring healthy food choices to neighborhoods

Department of Labor:

- Incentivize employers to pay livable wages, provide insurance, and paid time off.
- Support employing people who have lived experiences in the carceral system
- Collaborate with member agencies to increase meaningful workforce development opportunities in for youth in their neighborhoods.

Department of the Interior:

- Provide funding for communities to create safe and accessible play and recreation spaces for children.

AmeriCorps:

- Send Americorps members into neighborhoods most impacted by the criminal and juvenile legal systems to talk to families and identify community specific needs, identify any existing community organizations already trusted within the community, and act as liaisons to bring additional services and resources to the community.
- Send Americorp members to establish the neighborhood level community centers to coordinate services in a one-stop service model, and to train community members for employment at the community centers.

Drug Control Policy & SAMHSA:

- Support community-based addiction services that can be accessed for free and without court involvement.

Thank you for your consideration of the youth defender perspective and these recommendations.

Robert Rodemeyer
Cook County State's Attorney's Office
Supervisor, Juvenile Justice Bureau, Child Protection Division

Empowering Youth Alongside Their Families and Communities

Juvenile justice prevention requires coordinated services implemented well before a youth's initial contact with law enforcement. Youth should be built up and placed in a position to stand up against a myriad of negative influences. Our youth require positive stable support. Families and communities should be vested with the resources necessary to guide their young people. Through community-based services aimed at promoting positive social and emotional development, secure attachments, as well as a sense of identity and belonging in our young people, we empower our youth and place them in a position to succeed.

Promoting positive social and emotional development begins at birth. The first 3 years of a child's life are the most crucial for brain development. Studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Child Development have established that early childhood trauma in the form of either abuse or neglect during the first 3 years of a child's life directly impacts brain development. A child's brain develops 1 million neuropathway connections between birth and age three. Infants and toddlers are ready to absorb new information, environments, and love from their caregivers. An individual's understanding of the world, relationships, safety, security, and more is all forged during this period.

We are born with billions of neurons, but they are not for the most part connected. Connections between synapses are strengthened through repeated positive experiences. These connections are vital in helping babies learn the essentials they need to survive and thrive within their family, community, and culture.

Our understanding of safety and security is forged during this developmental period. During the first three years of life, emotionally nourishing relationships lay the foundation for lifelong health and well-being. A baby's earliest relationships and experiences with their parents and other caregivers dramatically influences brain development, social-emotional functioning, and cognitive skills, impacting future health and success in school and life.

Promoting positive social attachments with primary caregivers and reducing ACEs improves one's social and emotional functioning throughout life. The extent to which our youth see themselves as part of the community and their sense of empathy for their neighbors are all impacted during this crucial phase of brain development.

Parents must be equipped to both provide healthy attachments while minimizing environmental ACEs. Incorporating this information into expecting and new parent education administered by health systems and community service agencies will increase parental awareness of these important concepts.

Early childhood education has been shown to reduce ACEs as well as promote and provide secure attachments to infants. Beyond providing a positive influence, early childhood education

centers can work with families to improve the caregiver-child relationship. When needs are identified within a family, on-site clinical personnel can work with caregivers to increase their understanding of the child's social and emotional development.

Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP) have been successful at developing a caregiver's understanding of 0-3 social and emotional development. Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) is effective in helping a caregiver understand their child's cues as well as the impact their actions have on their child's sense of safety and security. Partnering with established and trusted community services providers to expand access to these therapeutic interventions can assist in cases where family risk factors have been identified.

The second key phase of social and emotional development occurs during adolescence. Neural pruning occurs during this time. Frequently used adaptive neuro pathways are reinforced and infrequent pathways are lost. Maladaptive and anti-social behaviors are fortified during this period. It is therefore imperative that community services and activities promoting positive adaptive behaviors and social activities are provided to youth pre-adolescence and carry through into young adulthood.

An individual's sense of identity is also developed during adolescence. Negative peer influences capitalize on this need. Youth therefore benefit from being deeply rooted in a positive social peer group well before entering adolescence. Expanding resources for schools and localized community groups with attractive programming for youth before adolescence can foster a strong positive sense of identity and belonging capable of remaining viable into adulthood.

Effective programming should foster strong positive attachments and promote mentorship. To ensure community buy-in, programs must be authentic and cognizant of historical trauma and distrust. Organizations should be locally run by community members whose leadership and staff are reflective of the community. The activities should be attractive and of interest to young people while also providing them with lifelong pursuits and a sense of identity. Youth leadership, arts and agricultural programming which enable youth to effectuate positive change in their community should be invested in as they promote an attachment to the community and its wellbeing. As youth enter adolescence, programming would benefit from providing vocational opportunities and financial incentives to minimize the financial allure of the street economy promoted by negative peer groups.

Negative peer influence is omnipresent. Positive peer groups and pro-social programming should be provided with the resources to be as available. Fostering a sense of community and identity requires wrap-around services. Programming should work to incorporate families and integrate themselves into households engaging caregivers and sibling groups. A youth's ability to forge a strong healthy attachment with positive mentors is critical to the success of these programs. Frequent staff turnover and the utilization of short-term interns undermines the development of these relationships. Resources should be utilized to attract high quality staff and encourage long-term commitments.

Following initial contact with law enforcement, diversion programs implemented by law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies are effective at reducing the probability of youth

entering the justice system. By partnering with the same established community groups, positive mentor connections and engaged caregiver support outlined above, diversion programs can provide wholistic wrap around services better suited to deter further negative peer influence.

A positive in-home response which engages the caregiver following contact with law enforcement can work to ensure an in-home wraparound response. Short-term home-based therapeutic interventions including Placement Stabilization Services utilized by child welfare agencies to promote placement stability; and Screening Assessment and Support Service (SASS) relied upon following discharge of youth from inpatient psychiatric care have been effective at stabilizing youth in the home setting and connecting caregivers to community resources. Providing similar programming following a youth's initial arrest can assist caregivers in fashioning an in-home response to the youth's criminal activity and connect the family to the positive supports outlined above.

Fostering a youth's understanding of the impact of their actions on their family, peers, neighbors, and community at large is also an effective deterrent. Victim impact panels and statements, peer meetings, and informal community justice proceedings aid in developing a young person's awareness of the real consequences of their actions. Building these types of proceedings and programs into the community agencies outlined above fosters a continuum of care and ensures the engagement of established positive supports.

When charges are filed and a youth formally enters the juvenile justice system, court interventions should capitalize on the community supports and relationships outlined above. By coupling probation and formal therapeutic interventions with wraparound community-based interventions that provide youth with a healthy self-identity, pro social activities, and positive peer groups, the influence and allure of negative peer groups is reduced and the impact of a youth's understanding of the impact of their actions on their community is further developed.

The juvenile justice system should conduct itself in a manner that is trauma responsive. While the system needs to pursue justice on behalf of victims of crime and the community, it must remain cognizant of its responsibility to the youth before it.

To promote a response that is empathetic to the juvenile and their needs, juvenile justice judges, attorneys, probation officers, clinicians and service providers should receive training around ACEs and the impact of trauma on a young person's decision-making. In its efforts to promote a youth's sense of accountability, the juvenile justice system would benefit from a developed understanding of the impact the youth's upbringing had on their decision making.

Where clinical interventions are necessary, delays and disruptions to the provision of these services undermines their success rate. Youth benefit from consistency and an understanding that the juvenile justice system is invested in their progress. Long waiting lists and the utilization of interns with high rates of turnover, as well as clinicians who either do not reflect the community they are service or fail to possess awareness as to how cultural differences may impact the therapeutic process, limit the therapeutic connection as well as the potential for progress.

Understanding the youth and their community's perception of mental health services is also important. Where there is stigma attached to treatment, therapeutic interventions should be packaged in an attractive manner capitalizing on existing positive outlets embraced by the community such as visual art, athletic, music and drama programs.

In exploring barriers to success and opportunities for improvement, struggles of child welfare youth in the juvenile justice system should be examined. Investing in these dual system youth provides assistance to our most vulnerable. Dual System or Dually Involved Youth programs and cross agency collaboration between the juvenile justice and child welfare systems eliminates communication gaps, reduces redundancy, and allows both agencies to capitalize each other's experience.

33% of child welfare system-involved youth have had contact with the juvenile justice system; overall. Maltreated youth are estimated to be at a 47% greater risk for becoming involved in juvenile justice proceedings than general population youth. A history of neglect or abuse is shown to increase the risk of youth arrest by 55% and increase the risk of committing violent crimes by 96%. As involvement in the juvenile justice system deepens (significant, violent offenses, resulting in periods of incarceration) youth with a history of child welfare system involvement comprise a larger share of the population than general population youth.

Youth involved in the child welfare system generally receive harsher treatment within the juvenile justice system. For example, they are less likely than delinquent youth without maltreatment histories to receive probation and more likely to be placed in group homes or correctional facilities.

Studies highlight the importance of screening for trauma across each touchpoint of the juvenile justice system (e.g., detention, court, probation, corrections). When a youth enters the juvenile justice system, parties must identify trauma experiences especially those associated with child protection actions. In addition to identifying trauma, there is a need to ensure that pertinent information about youth is available to parties as youth move across placements, programs, and agencies. Investment in cross agency collaboration and dual youth programs can facilitate these trauma check-ins as well as cross-system collaboration and information sharing.

In Cook County, our Juvenile Justice Division and Child Protection Divisions work side-by-side in the Juvenile Justice Bureau. We take the Child Protection Division's experience with these young people and their families into account when we initially encounter a young person in the Juvenile Justice Division and in our pursuit of public safety and restorative justice for the youth, the victim, and the community.

We have recently developed several initiatives to better serve Juvenile Justice youth with a history of trauma. These initiatives are a primary focus of both our office as well as the entire court system. Through new screening procedures, external partner notification, and internal information sharing and collaboration, our Juvenile Justice system, is making better informed charging decisions, ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in Juvenile Justice proceedings, and providing therapeutic services informed by a youth's past treatment history.

Kyla Woods
CEO, Klover Strategies

Resource-Rich...Coordination-Poor

Dear Coordination Council Members,

It is a pleasure to be here with you all. I often advocate for a multifaceted approach to respond to the needs of youth and young adults and am encouraged by the commitment Council Member agencies have made to system-wide collaboration. My name is Kyla Woods. I am a youth justice advocate with lived experience, direct service provider, policy expert, member of the District of Columbia's Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG), and the CEO of Klover Strategies. For the past five years, I have partnered with youth-serving agencies to ensure the integration of youth expertise to improve policy and program implementation. Since 2019, I have witnessed the value of creating space for young people to be directly involved in driving systems that heavily influence their lives. I have had the privilege of mobilizing youth-centered initiatives within the Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Behavioral Health, and the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group in the District of Columbia.

In 2016, I sought out multiple youth service agencies after an anti-trafficking sting operation that resulted in my trafficker being arrested, while I was charged with prostitution to ensure my testimony. I was left with a record, homeless, and suffering from depression at eighteen. It was advocates and social service coordination that allowed me to foster the confidence to apply to the University of Columbia in 2017 and graduate magna cum laude with a bachelors in political science. Housing, legal, and healthcare resources provided a path toward higher education and economic stability. I am confident that without receiving support to meet my basic needs, I would not have been prepared to advocate for myself or imagine life beyond crisis.

While it is often said that many metropolitan areas are resource-rich, it is also true that many are also, coordination-poor. Unfortunately, this often leads to bureaucratic and often duplicative procedures that can often be discouraging and confusing. In 2019, I had the privilege of participating in a two-year HUD-funded fellowship designed to improve youth homeless services in the District of Columbia. During my tenure, my colleagues and I conducted countless listening sessions and participated in biweekly youth advisory board meetings. Our peers often responded that a combination of mental health housing and employment support would lead to the prevention of housing insecurity and legal system involvement.

In my experience, social service and justice agencies that partner strategically with youth and families benefit from consistent quality improvement by identifying pain points in need of greater coordination. However, most youth justice sectors remain siloed, and I have found myself advocating for similar interventions to prevent exploitation, housing instability, and incarceration in sectors that are not incentivized to collaborate on the ground. As an advocate, I commend the investments made in recent years toward system collaboration, but I have yet to see this reality fully realized in my direct service experience.

When advocating for service coordination for my clients, I have noticed collaboration efforts can often be stunted or slowed due to bureaucracy and limited incentive to partner. Service providers that are overwhelmed and under resourced struggle to extend themselves not from apathy but from a lack of organizing capacity. In my organizing experience, transparency among youth-serving agencies also remains a barrier, yet it is imperative for system improvement. Multidisciplinary prevention initiatives must prioritize implementation oversight to match the policy and research advancements made. By partnering and investing in the expertise of youth, families, and front-line staff, youth justice agencies can obtain a more accurate picture of the achievements and lessons learned.

When considering the long-term success of justice-involved youth, we must not only respond to the vulnerabilities they face. We must identify and build the capacity-protective factors that exist in their communities. Ultimately, we cannot rely on systems to provide the care, love, and consistent connection youth and young adults deserve. Investment in community-based organizations that build resilience and social connection for youth and families is key to achieving a proactive posture.

In many areas there are mutual aid, wellness, mentoring, and violence disruption organizers that meet the needs of their communities but lack the funding or coordination support to make an impact at scale. I believe Council Member agencies can greatly benefit from calling on non-punitive community-based organizations, justice-impacted youth, and families to reimagine prevention. Interventions will vary; however, collaboration with youth, families, and communities have a long-lasting impact on both the youth-serving agencies and individuals who have leveraged their systems knowledge to build resilience.

Steve Anjewierden
Chief of Police Services (retired)
Training Director
iCHAMPS Crime Prevention Center

Policy & Practice Recommendations for Law Enforcement in Preventing Youth Entering the Juvenile Justice System or Supporting Justice-Involved Youth in Communities

The importance of the role of Law Enforcement in preventing youth from entering the juvenile justice system is critical. Police officers encounter youth every day and can have a significant impact in the young person's life. These encounters can be positive or negative and the outcomes can be highly influenced by the officer's actions. Officers often encounter youth in non-criminal situations and these opportunities should be maximized to create positive law enforcement and youth relationships. Officers also come across youth in situations where there are violations of the law. In many cases, the nature of an offense does not allow for discretionary decision making. However, in other cases there are a wide range of options, and in all cases, the officer should be thoughtful of their actions and understand that the outcomes we are after is behavior change and not punitive action.

Three areas of focus:

1. Law Enforcement Training
2. Law Enforcement Partnerships
3. Law Enforcement Internal Policies

Some concepts will fall into all three categories. For example: School Based Law Enforcement. Officers should highly trained in understanding their role, the role of school officials, and adolescent development including trauma informed practices. Officers should be aware of community and governmental programming to support the pro-social development of students and access to diversions and other alternatives to the juvenile justice system. Finally, policy and law can be developed and implemented to provide direction, mission and to clarify actions that can be taken by an officer and those that cannot.

1. Law Enforcement Training

Training for law enforcement officers can significantly reduce arrest of youth and thereby prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system (JJS). Training officers on the teen brain will make it less likely for them to criminalize regular adolescent behavior. Additionally, training on restorative and trauma-informed practices can provide law enforcement officers a better understanding on why diversion programs can produce better longterm outcomes for youth, the community and for law enforcement. Community service providers should be included in the trainings so that law enforcement officers become familiar with the services provided, build relationships with community members, and can better navigate the referral process when using discretion and diverting youth to diversions programs.

- **EXAMPLE:** Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) Juvenile Detectives Unit

This training was developed in partnership with the Center for Coordinated Assistance to States (CCAS/ OJJDP), MPD department leadership, community service providers and the Minnesota State Racial and Ethnic Disparities coordinator. It was delivered to the Juvenile Detective Unit and included many of the topics below. It was the first time that juvenile detectives and community providers of restorative practices had met and discussed each other's work.

- Procedural Justice & Legitimacy of Police
- Role of law enforcement officers when working with youth
- Adolescent development & the teen brain
- Principles of Effective Programming
- Diversions & alternatives to juvenile justice system
- Restorative justice & trauma-informed care.
- Screening & assessment of youth receiving services
- Collaborative decision-making on diversion criteria
- Provide training in police academy, field training, and throughout career

2. Law Enforcement Partnerships

Law enforcement should partner with several institutions and community-based organizations to increase the amount of options to address areas of youth need while also increasing protective factors. These partnerships can be used to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, but can also be used with justice-involved youth. These programs can be developed with input from a variety of sources, including community members, with the understanding that they all must meet the legal requirements and ethical standards of each discipline.

EXAMPLE: Center for Restorative Youth Justice (CRJA):

CRYJ is the diversion program based on restorative justice that is used in the School Justice Partnership in Kalispell, Montana. It is a key element in the goal to identify appropriate alternatives to the juvenile justice system. The team includes the school district, local SRO's and a chief probation officer embedded within the school itself. It is an example of creative partnerships to reduce school based arrests and keep students in the school setting while supporting and addressing potential needs of youth and creating a safe, healthy learning environment in the schools.

- School Justice Partnerships (law enforcement, juvenile probation, education, community service providers)
- Co-Response Models (law enforcement, mental health providers, emergency services)
- Social Correlates of Crime (law enforcement, district attorney diversion program)
- School-Based Law Enforcement Programs (aka School Resource Officer Programs)
- Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management Teams (school and community-based)

3. Law Enforcement Internal Policies

Law enforcement agencies can implement internal policies that would improve the quality of professionalism among officers, improve the relationship with the community, uphold the safety and well-being of both community and law enforcement officers.

EXAMPLE 1: Social Correlates of Crime (SCC)

SCC is a law enforcement partnership in Denver Colorado that changed the Denver Police Department policy from responding to runaway youth to allowing county employed social workers to respond to runaway calls and develop a case management plan for those youth.

EXAMPLE 2: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

School-Based Law Enforcement Programs (SBLEP, aka School Resource Officer Programs) place law enforcement officers in schools. MOUs between law enforcement and the school districts should be developed to create clear guidelines for law enforcement officers and school administrators when engaging in problematic behaviors among youth, as well as create a positive, healthy and safe learning environment in schools. MOUs maximize the social and community value of an officer while also regulating the use of arrest and diversions. These documents can contain critical information establishing the purpose of the SBLEP and governing the actions of officers and their school partners. Specific language in the document can set standards for training, positive student engagement, record sharing, assignment and separation of job duties, financial agreements, etc.

- Create recruitment, retention & promotion that increase different backgrounds, such as education and social work
- Generate a clear understanding for the use of law enforcement discretion to divert youth from arrest
- Implement community policing practices, emphasizing problem-solving strategies and de-emphasizing the focus on arrests, especially among youth
- Hire civilian caseworkers & mental health therapists as resource for community
- Hire mental health professionals and promote the use of Employee Assistance Programs for use of law enforcement personnel
- Establish minimum specialty training requirement for officers working with youth, as mentioned above in section 1.

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Laura Broyles

**Director of the Office of Standards for Prevention and System Improvement, Oklahoma
Office of Juvenile Affairs**

Removing Barriers and Creating Pathways to Success for Youth, Families, and Communities

Good afternoon, Administrator Ryan, and members of this council. I am honored by this invitation to speak to you today. As a state administrator and Title II program manager for the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs, a hope-centered and trauma informed juvenile justice agency. Over the past two decades, I have discovered the work we do to implement the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) must transcend partisan politics as we continuously assess, evaluate, monitor, and navigate the evolution of political will by key justice system gatekeepers. We do this so that we will improve policy, practice, and programming for youth, families, and communities at the local, state, and national level. What we do, each one of us, matters and either fortifies a barrier or opens and supports a pathway to a future of success. Through our collaborative efforts, we have made great progress at local, state, and national levels, however, much work remains.

The following recommendations to improve coordination of services and supports were developed from personal experience and conversations with partners, colleagues, staff, and the youth and families we serve. Improving the coordination of services and support for delinquency prevention and justice involved youth and families requires us to continually step back and assess our personal and public strengths and weaknesses, working together to build pathways for youth success, stronger families, and thriving communities.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Early in my career, as I learned about the value of the JJDP and the effectiveness of the initiatives and funding, I quickly realized the need to work to embed it into every part of the juvenile justice system. Twenty plus years into the work, I witness this awareness among system stakeholders every day. The JJDP has improved outcomes for youth and reduced the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system. It is recommended that pathways for collaboration across systems at the local, state, and national levels be created and supported, with guidance provided specifically to state administrators, teaching them how to embed the JJDP in every aspect of the juvenile justice system. Education on the core mandates of the JJDP should be provided across all systems and among every system gatekeeper, including attorneys at the local, state, and federal levels. State administrators of the Title II funding need guidance on how this can be done and what the benefits are (e.g., long term sustainability of effective programming and the leveraging of resources).

Additionally, and to further ensure the long-term impact of the act and the spirit behind the act, retention issues and longevity of Title II state administrators must be examined, and solutions explored. Turnover across the states and territories for Title II administrators has improved with OJJDP's certificate training programs as they have placed more value in the work and have strengthened the credibility of the work under the JJDP. Improving the retention of state

administrators will improve the coordination of services for delinquency prevention programming and outcomes for justice involved youth.

CUT RED TAPE AND REMOVE BARRIERS

Through our own efforts to remove barriers and provide pathways for youth, Oklahoma has discovered barriers can often be created unintentionally from policies, rules, and legislation. Several years ago, we began working closely with our workforce development providers to create a statewide plan to make employment resources available to all youth who have contact with the juvenile justice system. This resource provides employment training, education, and opportunities to youth who are at least 16 years of age. Unfortunately, we quickly discovered a barrier because of a Department of Labor policy that requires seventy-five (75) percent of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds be spent on out of school youth. The language clearly articulates a value in providing employment resources to juvenile justice involved youth, however in practice the policy limits access for most justice involved youth because, if involved at any level of the juvenile justice system (deferred decisions, probation, and state custody), these youth are no longer defined as “out-of-school” youth.

Education and school attendance is often a key priority of deferred agreements, court supervision, and out of home placements. Limiting these funds with this definition as is limits access by justice involved youth to this vital resource. This definition creates a barrier and limitation for a large portion of those youth at risk of penetrating deeper into the system or of reentering the system without access to these employment supports. By the time agreements are made and the referrals are submitted, the youth we work with are frequently back in school or have been in school while under supervision. All youth referred to this resource from the juvenile justice system should have access to these resources. Changes to this policy needs to come from a federal level as local boards must go through a time-consuming process to obtain waivers to pilot a modification .

It is therefore recommended cross agency collaboration and listening sessions be conducted to review policies and rescind or amend those that prevent access to resources, beginning with review of the Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 23-14ⁱ.

VITAL DOCUMENTS

As youth transition to adulthood, obtaining vital documents is critical. Youth must obtain employment and a driver’s license, sometimes their first apartment. To do this, they need an original birth certificate and social security card. Some youth have moved so many times across systems that they do not know their address(es) and incorrect answers to the question, “which addresses have you lived at” result in security holds in the online process to obtain documents. Additionally, if there have been multiple requests for a social security card, the youth may be unable to obtain the card because of a limitation on the number of requests that may be made. This is not uncommon due to requests from multiple caregivers. Youth impacted by multiple systems should be exempt from this rule. These are just two of the examples given when discussing barriers for accessing resources, like vital documents, with staff.

A closer examination of the barriers to obtaining interstate and state vital documents would be beneficial to assist with the development of solutions. In addition, providing a pathway for states to obtain vital documents through interstate collaboration and supporting states to develop the infrastructure needed to implement statewide and interstate data systems that are designed to streamline resources for youth and families will remove barriers and increase opportunities while simultaneously assisting with resource management.

We all understand our youth are on a continuum of care, but we seldom consider them as having one single life continuum with multiple agency resources investing in that continuum. Across all agencies we often serve the same families, but it is challenging to know what agencies they are involved with and coordinate services in a thoughtful and meaningful way. Many agencies have system databases with resources, but these systems rarely talk to each other. In fact, there are times the lack of collaboration creates hardship for the families or results in a duplication of services or worse a gap in services for those who need it most. Existing databases for vital documents are designed to prevent fraud but have unintended consequences for youth who have complex histories with unstable housing or cross system involvement. The delay or barrier in accessing these documents prevents youth from successfully transitioning into adulthood and engaging in their communities. The unintended consequences adversely impact the youth, the systems serving the youth and families, and the communities in need of their economic contributions. These barriers cost taxpayers' money at every level because the youth are held longer in government programming and not moving as quickly as they could to independence and ultimately economic contribution.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT COORDINATORS

During the last half-decade, we have strengthened youth and family voice, but have struggled to maintain the ongoing staff support needed for successful youth engagement. It is recommended that assistance to juvenile justice systems be provided to assist them with Identifying a pathway to hire a permanent youth engagement coordinator to support, engage, and strengthen youth voice in the review, development, and implementation of policy, practice, and programs within the juvenile justice systems. A youth voice with lived experience in the development and implementation of policies, practices, and programming is critical to the overall pathway of success for all youth and families served by the juvenile justice system. Building internal controls so these positions are protected from partisan politics and budgetary constraints will create a sustained pathway for youth with lived experience to have a voice in the long-term operations and success of the juvenile justice system.

In closing, there are so many more needs as evidenced by data and voiced by service providers, partner agencies, colleagues, staff, and the youth and families we serve. The annual three-year state planning and updates required by the Title II Formula grant, as specified in the JJDP, is an excellent tool to address the needs and resources within local and state jurisdictions. Oklahoma will continue to use this process to identify and address those gaps, remove barriers, and create pathways for success so Oklahoma families are strengthened, youth succeed, and communities thrive. It is my hope that in my lifetime youth will no longer be held in adult jails, isolated from peers, without proper treatment, education, or support. It is my hope that status offenses, youth behavior, and mental health symptoms will not be treated as criminal behavior and that all youth

will be afforded equitable opportunities and treatment that lead them on a pathway of hope and success.

Thank you.

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Ernestine Steward Gray
Retired Juvenile Court Judge
Orleans Parish Juvenile Court

Collaborating for Positive Messages and Better Outcomes

In 1982 in the “Disappearance of Childhood,” Neil Postman wrote, “Children are the living messages that we send to a time we will not see.”

We must remember as Dorothy Law Nolte wrote:

Children Learn What They Live

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel quilt.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
If a child lives acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

Juvenile Judges across the nation are making important decisions every day that change – even transform the lives of children, youth and families and determine the messages they are sending to “a time that they will not see.”

It is therefore our obligation and responsibility to ensure that the messages we send are messages of hope and promise. If we give children negative messages we give them of a lack of belief in their abilities, that they are not important, that they cannot accomplish great things, that they don’t belong and that they are not important. Our generation must give children the tools to shape the future based on the impact and influence of our examples upon their minds and future.

Hebert Hoover, the 31st President of the United States, in a message endorsing the Children’s Charter said, “Children are our most precious possession.” The Charter recognizing the Rights of the Child sets forth 19 provisions for “making every child healthier, safer, wiser, better and happier” and states that “Fathers and mothers, doctors and teachers, the churches and the lay organizations, the officers of government in the states and counties and towns, all have one common obligation — to advance these plans to better life for children.”

While there are provisions that address every aspect of a child’s life both in the cities and in rural areas including education, disabilities, etc. I call your attention, as relevant to this discussion:

...XIV. For every child who is in conflict with society the right

to be dealt with intelligently as society's charge, not as society's outcast; with the home, the school, the church, the court and the institution when needed, shaped to return him whenever possible to the normal stream of life.

XV. For every child the right to grow up in a family with an adequate standard of living and the security of a stable income as the surest safeguard against social handicaps.

...For EVERY child these rights, regardless of race or color, or situation, wherever he may live under the protection of the American flag.

Unlike the Child Welfare field, there are few federal laws, guidelines, recommendations or best practices for juvenile judges hearing delinquency cases. This leaves many judges with the responsibility for improving their individual courts and court practices without sufficient resources and support. This work is further complicated by the fact that when the child or youth and family appear at the court, they have entered many doors seeking help and have been interviewed, assessed, evaluated and diagnosed by several agencies who are responsible for ensuring the availability of services to meet the needs of children, youth and families.

In order for the nation's juvenile judges to be the most effective, they need:

-Practices that promote racial equity: Judges should receive training in cultural competency to understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of the youth they encounter. This includes awareness of how biases, explicit, implicit and systemic, can influence decision making. Implementing data collection and analysis can help identify and address racial disparities in the juvenile justice process. Involving community members, especially from marginalized communities, in the decision-making process can help ensure that the system is more responsive to the needs of those it serves.

-Access to Research Findings: Judges need access to the latest research on what interventions are effective for reducing recidivism and promoting positive outcomes for youth. This includes understanding the impacts of different sentencing options. Regular workshops, seminars, and webinars on the latest juvenile justice research can help judges stay informed about best practices.

-Building Consensus Around Probation Reform: Creating forums where judges, probation administrators and officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, community stakeholders and families can discuss and develop consensus on probation reform. Implementing and evaluating pilot programs can help in understanding the impacts of probation reform before they are widely implemented.

-Redirection of expenditures towards effective solutions at the front end of the system: Investing in prevention and early intervention by redirecting funds towards community-based programs and services that address the root causes of delinquency, such as poverty, lack of education, mental health and substance use issues. Investing in the training of judicial and law enforcement personnel in areas such as de-escalation techniques, mental health awareness and

alternative dispute resolution. Developing and funding diversion programs that allow for non-criminal handling of certain offenses, particularly first-time and minor offenders. Strengthening support for services like family counseling, educational support, mental health and substance use support as alternatives to detention.

-Understanding adolescent development: Research suggests that the human brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex responsible for decision-making and impulse control, does not develop until the mid-twenties. This is the reason some states are increasing the age of juvenile court jurisdiction, several states are looking at 18, 19 or 20 (Massachusetts and Vermont).

Judges, as conveners in their local communities, can play a pivotal role in transforming the juvenile justice system in America into one that is more just, effective and equitable. To do so requires a multifaceted approach involving training, research, collaborative reform efforts, and a re-evaluation of resource allocation, all aimed at preventing youth from entering the justice system unnecessarily and providing those who do with the support they need to succeed.

This is where the efforts of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and its member agencies become critically important.

After accepting the invitation to participate on this panel this afternoon, I had the occasion to discuss my appearance here with a few of my colleagues. To a person, they each identified as the first major problem **siloed budget funding**. They all indicated that there should be greater flexibility in funding and that incentives should be provided to among member agencies for shared problem solving and collaboration which will allow the agencies to obtain better outcomes for the children, youth and families. Agencies must stop worrying about their individual budgets and work together to use funds to provide the attention and services that are needed to send the messages we want delivered to “a time that we will not see.

Second, I would suggest that it is time to get rid of the “**At Risk**” label. Addressing the needs of children who require assistance involves a thoughtful approach, starting with how we conceptualize and label them. The label "at-risk" carries an inherently negative connotation that can inadvertently hinder efforts to support these children effectively. It suggests a focus on risks and deficits rather than strengths and potential, which can impact both the approach of the caregivers and the self-perception of the children. To foster a positive environment for these children, it is essential to shift our mindset:

- **Focus on Strengths and Potential:** Rather than emphasizing what they lack or their risks, highlight their strengths, talents, and potential. This positive framing can encourage a growth mindset in the children and inspire more constructive support strategies.
- **Use Empowering Language:** Replace terms like "at-risk" with more empowering language that reflects their potential for growth and success. Terms like "children with potential" or "youth in need of support" can foster a more positive approach.
- **Involve the Children in the Process:** Engaging the children in discussions about their needs and aspirations can be empowering. It helps them feel valued and understood, which is crucial for building self-esteem and a positive self-image.

- **Educate and Train Caregivers and Educators:** Those who work with these children should be trained to approach them with a mindset that focuses on empowerment, respect, and positivity. This includes understanding the impact of language and attitudes on children's self-perception.
- **Create Supportive and Inclusive Environments:** Ensure that the environments in which these children learn and grow are inclusive, supportive, and tailored to their unique needs and strengths.
- **Collaborate with Communities and Families:** Working closely with families and communities helps in understanding the unique challenges and strengths of each child. It also fosters a support network that extends beyond formal care or educational settings.

By rethinking how we label and think about children who need help, we can create a more positive and effective framework for supporting their growth and development. This approach not only aids in their immediate well-being but also sets a foundation for their future success and self-image.

Third, each agency should be estopped from relying on detention when their interventions, methods and treatments seem to fail. A prime example is the school to prison pipeline. Research has shown how overuse of juvenile detention (Waller, S.C., & Herting, J.R. (2020) *The Impact of Pretrial Juvenile Detention on 12-Month Recidivism: A Matched Companion Study*. *Crime & Delinquency*, 66 (13-14, 1865-1887) and Commitment (Aizer, A. and Doyle, J.J., “Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence From Randomly-Assigned Judges,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, June 2023) alike can increase crime. Youth incarceration is costly, ineffective and harmful to adolescents while not improving public safety. Recidivism rates are higher, and detention exposes youth to negative influences and fails to address the underlying issues that led to their delinquent behavior. Detention facilities often lack properly trained staff and effective rehabilitation programs with more emphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation failing to address educational needs, mental health or substance use issues or social skills development. Detention can disrupt the adolescent development process thereby leading to negative outcomes like educational disruption, social isolation and exposure to additional trauma. Additionally, black and brown youth are more likely to be arrested, charged, and detained than their white counterparts despite little difference in severity of offense and are more likely to face harsher treatment at every state of the process, from arrest to sentencing. The collateral consequences of involvement in the juvenile system extend beyond detention and affect future prospects of black and brown children and youth including higher dropout rates, dismissed employment opportunities and increased likelihood of future encounters with the criminal justice system. Because of these disproportionate impacts, there is support for alternatives to detention like community-based programs that focus on rehabilitation, education and community service which have shown promise in reducing recidivism and supporting positive youth development. Also important are restorative justice programs, mental health and substance use treatment and family engagement. The goal of the system should be to support the healthy development of all youth, regardless of race, while ensuring public safety and accountability.

Finally, agencies must create opportunities for meaningful involvement and participation in the reform efforts of those with lived experience in service delivery, policy development and

leadership. Persons with lived experience are agents of change who contribute their unique expertise and in-depth knowledge of navigating systems — they are experts by experience. Engagement with persons with lived experience is critical to identify the flaws in the system.

Perhaps the solution is creating a grant program which provide financial incentives to communities which successfully keep children and youth out of detention, with their families in local communities that have resources to address the root causes of delinquency. The program would be similar to incentives that were provided to states when youth in the child welfare system were adopted.

In conclusion, Council member agencies might enhance coordinated services to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system by collaborating to ensure a true “no wrong door” policy — no matter where (what agency) children, youth and families enter they will receive services appropriate for their needs without the need to be shuffled from one agency to another and those services will be provided the very first time the family seeks services and supports. Each agency will be mindful of the messages they are “sending to a time they will not see.”

Kari Rumbaugh
Deputy Administrator, Juvenile Probation Services Division
Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation

Testimony for the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Good afternoon members of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. My name is Kari Rumbaugh, and I am an employee with the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, serving as the Deputy Administrator overseeing the Juvenile Probation Services Division. I am honored to receive this distinguished invitation to speak to you as an expert panelist as Nebraska Probation has strived over the last ten years to implement juvenile justice reform resulting in significant accomplishments. I come before you today with over twenty years of probation experience and a drive to positively impact youth and families in the justice system.

In 2013, Nebraska launched juvenile justice reform with the passing of significant legislation which focused on two essential elements, reducing the number of youths in out-of-home placement and reducing the number of youth made wards of the state for the sole purpose of receiving funding for services. This essential responsibility was placed with the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, specifically Juvenile Probation due to marked leadership and an extremely successful pilot. Additionally, similar to other states, in 2006 Nebraska Probation had previously prioritized implementation of Evidence-based Practices, with a core focus on research and a belief that the principles directly impact recidivism reduction.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to share with you our successes and lessons learned as we continue to implement juvenile justice reform in Nebraska and am hopeful that these experiences will assist the Council members in enhancing coordination ultimately impacting the lives of youth and families in the justice system.

How can Council member agencies enhance coordination to prevent youth from entering the justice system?

Nebraska juvenile justice reform prioritized both prevention and diverting of low-risk youth from the juvenile justice system. This was done by creating a statutory process and funding for local communities to target their own specific needs. The process included the creation of community plans and submission of state grants that allow local communities to receive funding for services and programs specifically focused on prevention of juvenile justice involvement. Additionally, the statute required services and programs to focus on Evidence-based Practices and support from a local university to assist in fidelity, data gathering and reporting of progress within the communities. Juvenile Probation has been a consistent partner in these efforts through reviewing local grants, participating on statewide committees, and engaging in local community planning.

Through these efforts we have learned that it is essential to empower local communities to identify services and programs to meet their individual needs. Additionally, there has been state level support providing education and technical assistance, which has proven to be an essential element to success. This has included on-site support, as well as statewide focused conferences.

Additionally, as Nebraska is a rural state with ninety-three counties assisting them with identifying needs and clarifying best-practices has been an ongoing priority.

We have learned that the coordinated focus of this prevention work in Nebraska has moved local communities toward building services and programs that are available to youth and families to prevent system involvement. By providing resources which support this approach communities continue to be strengthened, and reporting has started to create a picture of prevention accomplishments.

How can Council member agencies coordinate to increase access/remove barriers to opportunities and services that support the success of justice-involved youth in their communities?

As juvenile justice reform continues in Nebraska, we believe that focusing effective programs and services on youth and families impacts long-term behavior change and risk reduction. As juvenile justice professionals we share the goal that by prioritizing Evidence-based Practices and youth specific research we will be able to improve opportunities and remove barriers. During this time, we have recognized success, although have also learned many essential lessons which we continue to build on to improve implementation, coordination among professionals and ensure we keep our focus on those we serve. I appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences with you and believe they truly enhance our work with youth and families and strengthening communities.

Validated Assessment Instruments and Targeted Recommendations: During our initial implementation of Evidence-based Practices in 2006, like other jurisdictions, we implemented validated risk/need/responsivity assessment instruments. Following the launch of reform, we found it was essential to create a tool that would assist probation officers in making recommendations to the court that were focused on the assessment instrument findings, individualized probation supports/services and detailed exhausted efforts. Therefore, in 2017 the Juvenile Probation Services Division created the “Service Recommendation Matrix” which was modeled after a similar tool from another jurisdiction. Upon initial implementation, feedback regarding confidence in the recommendations of the matrix was brought forward by multiple stakeholders due to scoring fidelity questions regarding the current assessment instrument which was embedded into the matrix.

Additionally, during that time probation was also contracted with a local university to study the validity of the risk/need/responsivity assessment instrument specifically focusing on Nebraska youth. The study was completed in 2017 and the results supported the validity of the tool. As a result of the findings and current feedback regarding the matrix, juvenile probation leadership traveled with the researcher across the state and presented the findings to judiciary and multiple stakeholders. During these sessions many verbalized an increased confidence in both the assessment instrument and matrix. Currently, the matrix has been identified as a strength specific to Nebraska in probation reviews and next steps will include studying the matrix to ensure fidelity. Overall, Nebraska has recognized a benefit in the creation of the matrix and the coordination with stakeholders to provide information to build confidence as we move into our next step of studying the instrument.

Skill Trained Staff: Probation officers are core to impacting youth and families as they are an essential support, intervention, and service. Ensuring highly skilled and trained probation officers continues as a key focus for Nebraska, as well as many jurisdictions, as it directly impacts relationships, youth skill-building and risk reduction. Probation staff have an extremely difficult job and equipping them for success is essential. For those working with youth and families, specific curriculum targeted on adolescent development, brain development and family skill building is essential. Nebraska Probation has prioritized training as an essential tool for building officer skills and currently provides a comprehensive eight-week curriculum for new staff, as well as advanced curriculum. Nebraska probation has found significant success in training on validated assessment instruments, three levels of Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Restructuring Group training specific for high-risk juveniles, Behavioral Health, and Advanced Coach for Excellence (AC4) with four core advanced training priorities. Nebraska continues to build our training curriculum and our focus for specific juvenile justice related topics.

Sustainable Community-based Services: As a key factor impacting juvenile justice reform in Nebraska and our focus of reducing the number of youths in out-of-home placement, the Home-based Initiative launched in 2017. This allowed for the implementation of Evidence-based in-home services across the state. The Home-based Initiative would not have been possible without significant coordination including partnerships and funding opportunities. Evidence-based programs can be costly to implement including licensure fees, specialized training, travel expectations, national coaching, and regular data entry. Currently, Nebraska has access to Evidence-based in-home services in 80% of our 93 counties, those without access have extremely low population rates. To ensure the success of these services Nebraska dedicated an administrative position specifically for the Home-based Initiative. Additionally, with funding to support sustainability, payment for licensure, training and expert assistance has been funded by local grants since 2017. The program has also undergone evaluations with initial results showing an increase in home-based services utilized for youth in the Nebraska juvenile justice system and a decrease in out-of-home services. As juvenile justice professionals we believe that removing youth from their homes could significantly impact long-term outcomes, I believe that in Nebraska the Home-based Initiative has removed barriers and enhanced community-based options for youth and families.

Individualized Incentives: Nebraska juvenile probation received grant funds to start a tangible incentives program in 2019. This program provided incentives for all juvenile probation officers to utilize when reinforcing positive behaviors of youth on probation. Not only has the implementation of tangible incentives allowed statewide juvenile probation to get closer to our goal of 4 incentives to 1 sanction, it has also provided probation officers a key resource for motivation and skill development. Additionally, in 2022 a special exceptions program was initiated resulting from probation officer feedback and supporting research which allows for a probation officer to work with a youth and identify an individualized tangible incentive, at times a higher cost than a traditional incentive. As a result of the impact of tangible incentives, Nebraska recognized a 36% increase in the number of tangible incentives utilized from FY 2021 to FY 2022.

Reentry Unit: Nebraska juvenile probation is responsible for reentry of youth from our highest-level facility in the state. Due to this essential role, in 2020 within the administrative office a field unit including a supervisor and specialized probation officers was created. The focus for this unit

is to support youth while they are at the facility, ensure comprehensive plans are in place prior to reentry and support the youth for a period after reentry. Additionally, the unit staff are leaders within the state and work to ensure exhausted efforts are made before a youth is recommended for this level of placement. They work diligently with the facilities, as well as with local probation officers, but most importantly youth. We believe that the structure of this team is essential to the reentry process, specifically for youth, families, and probation officers in Nebraska. Every youth has a comprehensive plan before they reenter into their communities and services and supports begin immediately. This dedicated team structure for the highest risk youth in Nebraska is essential for a successful transition home. The development of the team is still new within Nebraska, but having a team focused on reentry has proven an invaluable resource for high-risk youth and an essential practice.

Standardized Data and Reporting: Nebraska probation has published a juvenile justice specific annual data report since 2016. The report is provided to juvenile justice stakeholders to ensure essential data elements are reported regularly. In the FY22 report the Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice developed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) started to be incorporated. These juvenile specific data measures are a great resource, and more will be added into the report in the future. Additionally, the Nebraska Supreme Court created a standard definition for recidivism which was evaluated by a local researcher from 2010 to 2015 and then incorporated in the annual report. Nebraska has found a great benefit in regular data reporting as a priority to communicate progress regarding reform efforts.

Artwork Contest/Positive Representation of Juvenile Justice Youth: In an effort to promote positive youth development Nebraska Juvenile Probation Services Division created an artwork contest in 2016 for youth on probation. The artwork is submitted in multiple formats including drawing, painting, sculpture, or writing. The youth are asked to focus their artwork on their own personal journey in the juvenile justice system. Each year the artwork contest promotes the winners by providing them with a tangible incentive. The artwork and winners are included in the annual report, as well as additional resources, plus presented at local conferences. This is one way that Nebraska has found to represent youth in the juvenile justice system for their strengths. It helps them share their progress and illustrates how they have overcome challenges.

Expert Technical Assistance: Nebraska has had the opportunity to receive technical assistance in the form of training/coaching, evaluations, and implementation assistance from local and national experts throughout the reform efforts. This support has informed our work and assisted in the identification of successes, next steps, and priorities. Through this support we have enhanced our practices in local probation districts, as well as statewide. We have learned how important coordination of our efforts is and how to engage others to make sure they are ready for change, slow down to get it right and creating a way to ensure we include all perspectives. In 2017, one of the Nebraska probation districts received a county specific review, after receiving multiple recommendations they were not sure where to start, but with targeted implementation support from multiple national experts they have now made significant progress. This includes a new early release practice resulting in significant reduction in recidivism. Due to the significant progress within this county the same approach of implementation was launched with a probation review and technical assistance for the entire state. The initiative has been titled the Juvenile Justice

System Enhancement ~ Nebraska. This review is in the initial stages of implementation and will be the focus for the juvenile justice system work over the next several years.

In summary, based on my extensive experience and because of lessons learned I would encourage the Council members to consider the following:

- Support local communities in identifying their own individual needs, as well as provide them training and technical assistance to create services and programs that can prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system.
- Cultivate highly skilled probation officers who receive specialized training, especially youth and family focused.
- Prioritize Evidence-based and best practice resources such as a Service Recommendation Matrix, Home-based services, tangible incentives, or a Reentry Unit to enhance supervision and service access.
- Create opportunities for positive youth development by promoting a youth's individual strengths.
- Promote local and national evaluations and technical assistance focused on best practices, as well as implementation.
- Provide clear measures for how to represent data and reporting which demonstrates evidence of fidelity.

Thank you for your time and prioritizing juvenile justice as an essential focus area. I am truly honored to represent the collective work of Nebraska at today's meeting.