



# JDCAP

Juvenile Detention Centers  
and Alternative Programs

## **TESTIMONY ON PROBATION REFORM**

Presented to the Senate Judiciary Committee

By

Jeffrey Ralph, MS

Regional Director, JusticeWorks YouthCare

June 17, 2019

Good morning. I am Jeffrey Ralph, Regional Director, JusticeWorks YouthCare offering testimony on behalf of the membership of the Juvenile Detention Centers and Alternative Programs (JDCAP), an affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, representing agencies providing service to address the needs of juveniles involved in the justice system, I would like to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to offer these written comments for consideration. JDCAP is a statewide, nonprofit, bipartisan association representing the administrators and staff of agencies who serve justice-involved youth, within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Juvenile Detention Centers and Alternative Programs is a professional organization dedicated to supporting its members by: promoting sound policies, advancing best practice standards, and maintaining a continuous learning environment within the juvenile justice system. The Association serves to strengthen Pennsylvania juvenile justice provider network's ability to assure community protection and improve the well-being and quality of life of their constituents. To this end, the Association effects the achievement of favorable state legislation, programs and policies, and provides appropriate programs and services to its members.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our written remarks on probation reform. JDCAP member agencies provide services that arise from court processes and investigations undertaken by County Juvenile Probation Departments.

Since 2005, Pennsylvania has been involved in the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change (MfC) juvenile justice system reform initiative. In 2011, stakeholders were introduced to the framework of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy. In the years that followed, significant efforts have been put into place to operationalize the JJSES under the leadership of the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers and the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

However, much work must still be undertaken to accomplish true system-wide reform which ensures protection of Pennsylvania citizens and improves the outcomes of justice-involved youth. JDCAP stands ready to support ongoing probation reform as one component of system wide reform.

However, according to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), juvenile arrests for violent crime have dropped to a 30-year low, and fewer teens are being locked up than at any time in nearly 20 years. While much can be said about the accomplishments of PA's efforts, it is still unclear why referrals to probation have declined. As a result of this national trend in combination with the successful efforts of PA's Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy along with the current workforce shortages, the system that provides the underlying support of juvenile justice reform (the contracted service providers and community partners) is facing

significant challenges positioning themselves to provide the support necessary to demonstrate the successful outcomes associated with system reform. We now know to demonstrate improved outcomes, the system must continue to divert low-risk offenders from system involvement, connect youth with appropriate behavioral health services to address their non-criminogenic needs, and must invest in services that effectively address the individual youths' identified criminogenic needs to reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

To this end, the members of JDCAP have identified a number of proposals captured in our Policy Platform which if acted upon, will support probation reform by engaging and supporting system providers as real partners in overall system reform. The following Platform items speak specifically to the value of system enhancements that support probation reform:

The Association, in recognition of the growing crisis regarding number of unique populations within the juvenile justice system (gender, behavioral health, gender identity, young adults, autism, etc.):

- a. Supports the development of additional community-based behavioral health services for justice-involved youth within the state;
- b. Supports adequately training juvenile justice staff to manage the needs of these youth by providing stable, state-level funding for the development and ongoing administration of a comprehensive training program for juvenile detention centers and alternative programs that would provide training on behavior management, crisis intervention skills, cognitive functioning and psychopathology;
- c. Supports providing behavioral health services to justice-involved youth to maintain their safety, effectively meet their needs and help prevent the exacerbation of problems;
- d. Supports the examination of systemic issues around access to services, ability to obtain services and models for responding to the behavioral health needs of justice-involved youth; and
- e. Supports incentivizing the use of training methodologies that utilize electronic means to reduce travel and other costs for providers, including the use of video conferencing capabilities to facilitate staff participation in required training.

The Association supports quality year-round academic engagement and pro-social development programming for youth in the juvenile justice system and the provision of remedial educational support not otherwise available through basic education programs, and that they are reimbursable through the Needs-Based Budget process.

The Association supports efforts to create and maintain data collection and management systems that enable quality improvement opportunities both internally and systemically.

The Association supports funding to improve access and interaction with community support individuals and agencies who will provide transition services to youth re-entering or being diverted within the community.

The Association supports funding and technical assistance access for providers to improve their ability to provide a balanced approach (Community Protection/Competency Development/Victim Restoration) for justice-involved youth.

The Association supports efforts to enhance workforce development and retention.

The Association supports efforts to amend the Human Services Code to establish a new purpose clause for Article VII (relating to children and youth) to specifically set forth "child welfare" goals consistent with the Juvenile Act's mandates relating to dependent children, and "juvenile justice" goals consistent with the Juvenile Act's mandates relating to delinquent children.

The Association supports efforts amend the Human Services Code to ensure that, in the event of a delay in the timely adoption of the Commonwealth's budget, funding to reimburse counties for the cost of services to at risk, dependent, and delinquent children will continue uninterrupted at the level of funding approved for the prior fiscal year.

In closing, on behalf of the Juvenile Detention Centers and Alternative Programs, we would urge this committee to fully utilize our membership and association staff as experts in the field of juvenile justice service delivery as you continue to pursue opportunities for juvenile justice system improvement.

Thank you for reviewing our comments. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact the JDCAP Executive Director (Wayne Bear) at 717-736-4717 or via email [wbear@pacounties.org](mailto:wbear@pacounties.org)