

Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony of:
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My name is Sam Miller. I have been employed working in law enforcement and corrections in various capacities since 1976. My past work experiences include serving in the United States Army as a trained interrogator/interpreter, working as a counselor/guard in a county juvenile detention center, working as a municipal police officer, and working as both a county adult and juvenile probation officer. For the past fifteen years, I have served as the court-appointed Chief Juvenile Probation Officer in Cumberland County.

While serving as the appointed Chief Juvenile Probation Officer in Cumberland County, I have been actively involved as a member of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (PCCJPO). The Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers represents county juvenile probation departments across the State of Pennsylvania and works in close partnership with the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) to advance best practices in juvenile justice across the state. My involvement as an active member of the Chief's Council Executive Committee and past president of the Chief's Council has provided me a front row seat to juvenile justice initiatives nationally and within Pennsylvania. Having served as the stage-one (readiness) leader for the Chief's Council throughout the implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES), I have had first-hand knowledge regarding the importance and effectiveness of how essential visionary leadership is when addressing juvenile justice reform.

The Chief's Council, in conjunction with JCJC and PCCD, has provided this leadership while engaged in all aspects of juvenile justice reform. As the longest standing active member of the Chief's Council, I have seen many changes in both criminal justice and juvenile justice over the years. I enthusiastically support the evolution of correctional theory and believe the infusion of evidence-based practices has provided us with an opportunity to improve outcomes and change lives.

In 2009, Cumberland County became part of an evidence-based research project developed by Dr. Gina Vincent, PhD, Director of the National Youth Screening and Assessment Project at the University of Massachusetts Medical School which introduced evidence-based assessment of juvenile offenders to our intake process. The Youth Level of Service, Case Management Inventory (YLS-CMI) was selected as the evidence-based assessment tool to be utilized. Cumberland County Juvenile Probation Officers were trained to properly administer the YLS-CMI when assessing juvenile offenders referred to our department and the principles of risk/need and responsivity were introduced to probation staff.

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We discovered that our education on the principles of evidence-based practices and the use of the YLS Assessment Tool generated a number of positive takeaways. Included among these positive takeaways were:

1. Increased integrity and accountability in our system responses
2. Improved ability to explain decisions/recommendations; transparency; the process “follows the information”
3. Improved justification of service expenditures
4. More focused (targeted) responses to delinquency, and
5. An ability to develop outcome measures.

Shortly after our completion of the “YLS Research Project”, the concept of the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy was born and in 2012, JJSES was formally rolled out as a collaborative initiative of the JCJC, the PCCJPO, and the PCCD. Cumberland County Juvenile Probation understood the potential benefits of becoming an evidence-based organization, therefore we choose to actively advance the JJSES initiative in its entirety.

Included in the JJSES Initiative are a number of key components including:

1. Evidence-based practices training (EBP 101)
2. Stakeholder engagement (Professional alliance)
3. Motivational interviewing (MI)
4. Detention Assessment (PaDRAI)
5. YLS-CMI Risks/Needs Assessment
6. Maysi-2 Mental Health Screening
7. Targeted case plan development
8. Cognitive behavioral interventions (EPICS)
9. Standardized program evaluation protocol (SPEP)
10. Graduated responses, and
11. The development of specific performance measures (recidivism reduction)

As Cumberland County Probation Officers were exposed to the various pieces of the JJSES, it became apparent that the work of juvenile offender community supervision was evolving and placing greater demands on probation officer’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. With the introduction of risk and need assessments into routine practice, juvenile probation officers are now required to administer and score these instruments, to communicate risk/need information to other justice professionals, to interpret assessment information, and to develop case management plans designed to maximize offender compliance and to increase positive prosocial changes.

Traditionally, the role of a juvenile probation officer has in large part been that of a case manager. The birth of the JJSES and the infusion of evidence-based principles

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have required juvenile probation officers to move from a case management approach to what we call a “change agent” approach. This approach requires juvenile probation officers to translate risk/need assessment information into a strategic therapeutic intervention plan. This intervention plan is not simply a case management plan but rather one that guides the day-to-day direct “change-work” the probation officer engages in with the client. Once the probation officer has this road map for change, the “change agent” can now focus on initiating and facilitating attitudinal and behavioral change via the cognitive behavioral intervention process.

Some have questioned this approach as outside the expertise of traditional correctional theory. Others have embraced the advance of EBP as a necessary reform for both juvenile and adult offenders. As far back as 2008, Jennifer A. Fahey, Esquire, authored “A Prosecutor’s Primer on Evidence-Based Practice” for the Crime and Justice Institute and the National Institute of Corrections, writing in the release of the August, 2008 white papers known as the “box set”, that “as of 2008, more than one in every 100 adults in the United States is behind bars”. Since ninety-five percent of the incarcerated population is eventually released and of those approximately two-thirds commit new crimes within three years, many are rethinking current criminal justice policies and practices”. Ms. Fahey goes on to assert “criminal justice researchers have been identifying intervention strategies, that when applied to a variety of offender populations, reliably produce sustained reductions in recidivism. Such strategies have been referred to as evidence-based practices (EBP) and require application of specific principles in order to determine the most effective sanction, supervision, and services of each individual offender”. The birth of JJSES emanated from a recognition that effective juvenile offender intervention must focus on recidivism reduction through the utilization of evidence-based principles. These principles are as follows:

1. Assess actuarial risks/needs (YLS-CMI)
2. Enhance intrinsic motivation (MI,CBI)
3. Target interventions (Case planning)
4. Skill train with directed practice (EPICS)
5. Increase positive reinforcement (Graduated responses)
6. Engage on-going support in natural communities
7. Measure relevant processes/practices (Quality assurance), and
8. Provide measurement feedback

These principles have been incorporated within the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy and have generated positive outcomes throughout Pennsylvania. Each youthful offender who does not recidivate and leads a responsible, productive life results in reduced system costs and perhaps most importantly fewer future crime victims.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning.