

Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony of:
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Juvenile Court Judges' Commission
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Good morning. My name is Richard D. Steele, and I am the Executive Director of the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, otherwise known as JCJC. The JCJC was statutorily created in 1959 and is comprised of nine judges who are nominated by the Chief Justice and appointed by the Governor. Our mandated responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the establishment of standards regarding administrative practices and judicial procedures in our Pennsylvania juvenile courts, advising courts regarding the proper care of delinquent and dependent children, administering annual grants to improve county juvenile probation services, and making recommendations concerning juvenile justice-related evidence-based practices.

I am very pleased to be accompanied today by my friend and colleague Mr. Samuel Miller, Chief Juvenile Probation Officer in Cumberland County and currently the longest tenured member of the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers.

We have been asked today to talk about the accomplishments of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system from the viewpoint of what has been successful in our ongoing efforts of reform into an evidence-based system. In order to do so, a bit of background information is important to provide a context of our current situation.

Pennsylvania has always enjoyed a reputation as a progressive state regarding juvenile justice. Act 33 of the Special Crime Session of 1995 included amendments to our Juvenile Act purpose clause to include language now widely known as Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ). With this, we became the first of what has become many states to incorporate BARJ as the statutorily mandated mission of their juvenile justice system. Our BARJ implementation efforts, which are ongoing, have attracted national attention in juvenile justice circles.

In 2004 Pennsylvania was chosen to participate in the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change (MfC) juvenile justice reform initiative. Due in large part to the strong commitment to our Balanced and Restorative Justice statutory mission, Pennsylvania was the first state selected by the MacArthur Foundation to participate in its Models for Change Juvenile Justice Reform Initiative. MacArthur identified PA as a bellwether state that could serve as a model for the nation. Our involvement in the Models for Change initiative had three main target areas of improvement:

- 1) Aftercare (sometimes referred to as re-entry) – the time when the juvenile returns to his/her home community after being released from a residential delinquent facility.
- 2) Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) within the system;
- 3) Coordinating mental health services for juveniles in the system.

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Models for Change was a five-year initiative (2005-2010) that served as a catalyst for much of the evidence-based work that has since been implemented in PA's juvenile justice system. In the summer of 2010, at the annual strategic planning session held by the JCJC in conjunction with the Executive Committee of the PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, the main focus of discussion centered on the impending end of the MacArthur project and the need to establish a sustainability plan for the various initiatives developed over that time period. Other juvenile justice activities and projects also needed to be located under a single "umbrella" to not only assure sustainability, but also the coordination of projects.

The result of the strategic planning session was the creation of what is now known widely as the Juvenile Justice System Enhancements Strategy, or JJSES. JJSES is perhaps the most comprehensive juvenile justice reform strategy in the country. Early in the development process, a *Statement of Purpose*, widely endorsed by the various system stakeholders, was developed as follows:

JJSES Statement of Purpose

We dedicate ourselves to working in partnership to enhance the capacity of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system to achieve its balanced and restorative justice mission by:

Employing evidence-based practices, with fidelity, at every stage of the juvenile justice process;

Collecting and analyzing the data necessary to measure the results of these efforts; and, with this knowledge,

Striving to continuously improve the quality of our decisions, services and programs.

Following an official "rollout" in 2012, JJSES has impacted every level of our juvenile justice system through ongoing implementation and refinement of the critical components defined both in narrative form through the creation of a monograph, and graphically through the development of a JJSES framework.

At the heart of JJSES is a commitment to the use of evidence-based practices, which simply means the application of what we know in terms of research to what we do in our work with youth, their families, and the communities in which we live. It is the progressive, organizational use of direct, current scientific evidence to guide and inform efficient and effective services. Ultimately, the measurement of success largely focuses on our system's ability to reduce the risk of youth reoffending, which is the key to evidence-based practices as they relate to juvenile delinquency.

The transformation of our juvenile justice system through the implementation of BARJ, supported through our JJSES efforts, is an ongoing and never-ending process. The effort and accomplishments to date by our juvenile courts and probation departments has

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been extraordinary, and a detailed description of how this has been accomplished would be impossible to provide in the limited time available in this format.

Nevertheless, there are some overarching evidence-based concepts that are critically important in effective implementation. They include:

- Use of a validated risk/needs assessment and other screening instruments (structured decision making)
- Diversion of low risk offenders
- Understand the principles of risk, need, and responsivity factors unique to each individual
- Match services that target identified needs; promote positive youth development
- Use and align case plans that incorporate the results of screening and assessment instruments
- Enhance motivation
- Incentivize success and encourage accountability through the use of a graduated responses (incentive and sanctioning strategies)
- Train staff in recidivism reduction skills to promote them as “agents of change”; implement an evidence-based community supervision model
- Collect and analyze data, focus on outcome measurements
- Focus on continuous quality improvement

Ultimately, the success of any system reform effort needs to be measured in order to evaluate effectiveness. A key component of our JJSES is that of data collection and analysis. Key trends over a ten-year period show a consistent improvement in a variety of areas.

Trends from 2007 through 2017

- **Violent Crime Rate:** In 2017, the Juvenile Arrest Rate for Violent Crimes (which includes murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery,) was 251 per 100,000 juveniles in the population, which represents a decrease of 38.5% from 2007.
- **Juvenile Delinquency Placements in residential facilities:** Placements declined by 55.9% from 2007 to 2017. There were 4,207 fewer delinquency placements in 2017 than in 2007.
- **Juvenile Delinquency Placements as a Percent of all Court Ordered Dispositions -** decreased from 9.9% in 2007 to 6.9% in 2017.
- **Days in Residential Placement:** Total Juvenile delinquency placement days declined by 52.1% from Fiscal Year 08-09 through Fiscal Year 16-17. Juveniles spent 931,940 fewer days in residential delinquent placements in Fiscal Year 16-17 than in Fiscal Year 08-09.

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- Expenditures: Total Juvenile Delinquency Placement Expenditures declined by 39.0%, a savings of over \$125 million dollars from Fiscal year 08-09 through Fiscal Year 16-17. Between Fiscal year 15-16 and fiscal year 16-17 alone, expenditures decreased approximately \$14.2 million.
- Secure Detention: Secure Detention admissions declined by 55.4% from 2007 to 2017. There were 10,686 fewer secure detention admissions in 2017 compared to 2007.

Additionally, outcome data has been collected on an ongoing basis at the time that cases are closed from probation supervision. For the over 10,000 cases closed in calendar year 2018:

- 85.4% did not reoffend while under supervision
- 95.2% completed all community service hours ordered
- 84.3% paid restitution in full to their victims
- 95.6% who were ordered completed a victim awareness curriculum/program
- 87.3% were in school or working at the time of closing

In summary, we are convinced that the incorporation of evidence-based practices into our juvenile justice system has enhanced our ongoing Balanced and Restorative Justice mission implementation. As a result, our communities are now safer, offenders are being held accountable in a restorative manner, and youth who leave the system do so with newly acquired skillsets and competencies to enable them to become responsible and productive members of the community. We have every reason to believe that we will continue to improve our system outcomes as we refine our utilization of evidence-based practices in juvenile justice.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak with you today. At this point, I will turn the presentation over to Sam Miller, after which I will be glad to answer any questions.