



**Keystones for Reform: *Promising Juvenile Justice Policies and Practices in Pennsylvania—Executive Summary***<sup>1</sup>

*Already identified as a bellwether state in juvenile justice, Pennsylvania is poised to develop an exemplary system. The Commonwealth enjoys strong partnerships among key juvenile justice stakeholders – including judges, district attorneys, public defenders, probation departments, community leaders, and city, county, and state officials – and there is a considerable consensus about what needs to be done to build a better juvenile justice system. The Keystone State has a number of policies and practices that can be promising models for reform on a national level.*

**The Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission (JCJC): Infusing Judges’ Expertise in Juvenile Justice Policy and Training.** The Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission was established in 1959 as a central agency to provide leadership for and improve the provision of juvenile justice services in Pennsylvania. Through careful cultivation of relationships with the legislature, the governor’s office and advocates, the JCJC has succeeded in depoliticizing juvenile justice, ensuring that those knowledgeable in the field make the decisions about how things will operate at the state and local levels. Through the JCJC’s research and training arm, a cadre of professional staff collects data to track juvenile court processes, while training staff administer both short workshops and a weekend master’s degree program to enhance the skills of practitioners across the state. The combination of these activities has allowed the JCJC to influence statewide standards of practice and ensure successful implementation in local juvenile courts. During the mid-1990s, when states across the country were rushing to prosecute youth automatically as adults, the JCJC promoted a balanced policy. It worked with key legislators, the governor’s office, and the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association to ensure that judges could “reverse waive” youth back to the juvenile system when appropriate. Today, under the principle of Balanced and Restorative Justice, juvenile justice stakeholders embrace a vision that incorporates the goals of accountability, community protection, competency development, family preservation, rehabilitation and fairness. The JCJC’s 2004 report to the governor quantifies the state’s success in juvenile rehabilitation—nearly 9 out of 10 juvenile offenders completed supervision without a new offense, they contributed more than 550,000 hours of community service, paid

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<sup>1</sup> Authored by Neelum Arya, Eric Lotke, Liz Ryan, Marc Schindler, Dana Shoenberg, Mark Soler. The report is part of Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice, an initiative supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The Report is Embargoed until November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12:01 a.m.

restitution of more than \$2.1 million, and 8 out of 10 remained in school or participated in a vocational activity when released.

**Act 148 and Needs Based Budgeting: Incentives for Programs, Not Confinement.**

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system was once governed by the same incentives seen in other states: even though youth were arrested locally and could be managed with local or community resources, it often cost counties less to send delinquent youth to distant institutions managed and paid for by the state. Act 148 changed the fiscal incentives and helped keep youth in a home environment, in their communities, and in the least restrictive setting whenever possible by reimbursing counties much more for such placements than for state commitments. Act 148 was enhanced by the shift to Needs-Based Planning and Budgeting, in which local juvenile judges, probation departments and county child welfare agencies develop an annual plan that documents local service needs for court-involved youth and spells out the cost of those services, so that a relatively stable funding stream can be tapped from state and federal sources. Act 148 and Needs-Based Planning and Budgeting fundamentally changed the nature of delinquency services in Pennsylvania and the way they are delivered. In the three years after Act 148 was enacted, state subsidies for community programs nearly doubled, from \$65 million to \$114 million. Since then, secure placements for juveniles dropped, and community and day treatment placements increased. In 2003, only 5% (290 of 5,701) of the youth removed from their homes in Pennsylvania were confined in state facilities operated by the Department of Public Welfare.

**Allegheny County Juvenile Court's Community Intensive Supervision Program (CISP): A Community-Focused Alternative to Incarceration.** Allegheny County's Community Intensive Supervision Program (CISP), located in five Pittsburgh neighborhoods, is both an alternative to incarceration program and a re-entry program for youth returning from institutional placements. CISP provides close supervision and requires daily attendance at a program site seven days a week, electronic monitoring, daily school attendance, regular home visits, weekly drug testing, part-time employment, restitution, family involvement, and victim awareness. The key to success is that CISP is thoroughly integrated into the neighborhoods in which many youth in the juvenile justice system live. By harnessing local assets---such as local recreation centers, schools, and youth clubs---and hiring from the talent pool of these neighborhoods, CISP has developed services that are part of the fabric of the community. CISP participants devote at least 100 hours to community service, work in their communities to pay restitution, and develop viable career alternatives. In 2004, of the 187 youth discharged from CISP, 76% successfully completed the program, they paid a total of \$10,984 in restitution, and performed a total of 9,050 hours of community service.

**Investing Wisely: The Use of Evidence-Based Practices and the Funding of Prevention Programs.** While other governors claimed to be tough on crime, Governor Tom Ridge proudly noted that Pennsylvania was the "uncontested leader in juvenile crime prevention." Since the early 1990s, state officials have used "risk-focused prevention strategies" to develop prevention planning and programming at the local level. The state developed a partnership of cabinet level officials, business leaders, law

enforcement, non-profits and foundations to coordinate local, state and federal efforts, establishing infrastructure at the local level to use prevention dollars effectively. Under Governor Ridge, the state invested \$271 million in state and federal funds to support youth violence prevention. Today, funds are specifically earmarked for proven evidence-based practices—like Multi-Systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care—and legislation has institutionalized the shift by making delinquency prevention a permanent responsibility of state government.

**Screening Detained Youth for Mental Health Problems: Use of the MAYSI-2 in Secure Juvenile Detention in Pennsylvania.** When Pennsylvania introduced the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument Version 2 (MAYSI-2) into juvenile detention facilities in January, 2000, it was the first state in the nation to do so, setting the stage for profound improvements in mental health screening in juvenile facilities across the country. The MAYSI-2 is a validated screening tool that can be administered by non-professional staff and that assists juvenile justice personnel in identifying youth with significant mental health needs. Under the leadership of the Juvenile Detention Centers Association of Pennsylvania (JDCAP), it is now being used in 20 of the 23 detention centers in Pennsylvania, with most youth screened between 24 and 48 hours after admission. In data collection on the MAYSI from 2001 to 2003 in 18 of the state's detention centers, more than three-fourths of youth entered detention with some form of mental health need. The MAYSI proved its effectiveness: roughly 20% of the boys and 30% of the girls required referral for follow-up screenings with mental health professionals for suicide ideation or other warning signs.

**Keeping Population Under Control at Philadelphia's Youth Study Center (YSC): A Marriage of Detention Alternatives and Vigilance.** In response to litigation in the 1970s over abusive conditions and overcrowding at the city's Youth Study Center, Philadelphia has developed procedures to keep the detention population under 105 in a city of approximately 1.5 million people. The key components are a rich array of detention alternatives, speedy case processing, and vigilance by judges, advocates, probation staff and others. Collaborative detention planning includes public defenders, the courts, police, and prosecutors. There is a wide array of community-based alternatives to detention: Philadelphia has nine spaces in alternative placements for every secure detention bed, including community-based shelter beds and an array of in-home supervision options ranging from electronic monitoring and voice tracking systems to in-home detention and pre-and post-hearing intensive supervision programs. Court staff and other stakeholders carefully monitor the detention population, speeding up court, disposition and placement processes. As a result, the median stay for youth at the YSC is 2 days and the mean is 8 days.