



February XX, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Culberson
Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable José Serrano
Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the Act-4-JJ Campaign, a broad network of more than 300 organizations representing all states, territories and the District of Columbia, we are writing to express how important it is to fully fund critical juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs for Fiscal Year 2019. **Federal investments play an essential role in state juvenile justice efforts to protect youth and promote safe communities.** Overall federal support of key juvenile justice programs has declined to the lowest levels in more than a decade, and we are concerned about the impact that any further reductions in funding would have on states' ability to serve youth.¹

We are writing to encourage you to restore the critical juvenile justice funding that has been lost since 2002 and fund these programs at the levels provided for in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act (JJDPA), including \$92 million for Title II of the JJDPA and \$102 million for Title V of the JJDPA. The JJDPA has been so successful that 48 states and 6 U.S. territories participate in this voluntary program. We also encourage you to restore funding for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grants (JABG) Program to the FY 2013 spending levels. Any less funding for these programs would move even further away from the targeted federal involvement that has historically provided critical national leadership to states in preventing youth from entering the justice system.

For more than 40 years, the JJDPA has provided critical federal funding to states and tribes to comply with a set of core requirements designed to protect children from the dangers of adult jails and lockups; keep status offenders out of locked custody; and address racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system. Title II of the JJDPA funding supports state compliance with these core protections and helps build effective state systems. Title V is the only federal program that provides delinquency prevention funding at the tribal and local level to reach youth at risk and help keep them out of the juvenile justice system.

¹ *Juvenile Justice Federal Funding Chart, ACT 4 JJ, available at <http://www.act4jj.org/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/Appropriation%20Chart%20FY17%20updated.pdf> (last visited Jan. 29, 2018).*

The Tribal Youth Program, included in Title V of the JJDP, is the primary program through which tribal governments regularly receive juvenile justice funding and should be restored or, at a minimum, preserved at its current level.

In addition to these JJDP programs, funding through the JABG Program has supported state efforts to effectively strengthen supports for court-involved youth. Congress has zeroed out this funding in recent years, but we encourage you to call for these critical dollars to be restored. These funds support vital state efforts to effectively strengthen juvenile court services, such as behavioral health screening and assessment for court-involved youth and alternatives to detention.

Cuts to these programs have weakened the federal state partnership and stymied national, state, and local progress in this area. Many states have already had to significantly reduce services and further cuts would result in fewer youth having access to services designed to keep them from engaging in unlawful behaviors and penetrating deeper into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Below are just a few of the many hundreds of initiatives around the country that are supported by funding through the JJDP and could benefit from increased funding:

In **Alabama**, JJDP funding has been used to support diversion programs for truant youth and to support mentorship between youth and law enforcement. The Dallas County Truancy Intervention Program helps get to root causes of truancy and support students to get back on track. For example, Sam Jones, a Truancy Intervention Specialist, recalls one student who had already reached six unexcused absences early in the school year. Jones said he “was able to speak to the County truancy officer and made him aware of the situation and the truancy officer met with the family and discovered that there were health issues. This family was able to excuse some of the absences and avoid being referred to Juvenile Probation for truancy.”

In Marvel City, Alabama, Officer Lakeisha Atkins said that, with the help of funding through Title II of the JJDP, they were able to create the Marvel City Youth Program. Officer Atkins says “[t]he goal of the program is to reduce the risks and enhance the protective factors that prevent youth from reentering the juvenile justice system. It strives to facilitate and encourage community-wide efforts in combating the associated factors of at-risk youth by the following measures: improving prosocial behavior, discouraging drug and alcohol use, and improving access to community resources and positive adult mentors. It allows participants to interact with law enforcement community, broadening their perception, appreciation and adherence to the law....”

In **Arizona**, the Arizona Juvenile Justice Commission uses Title II funds to support prevention for at-risk youth who often do not receive help until they are involved in the justice system. Title II funds are used to improve the system in a way that increases parent engagement and informs judges, police, and attorneys of evidence-based methods to reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

California’s State Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention currently works with 18 subgrantees who receive Title II funding to help transform California’s juvenile justice system. For example, the Fresno County Probation Department received Title II funds to enhance its current reentry transition services by implementing the Planned ReEntry Program (PREP) project. With this funding, PREP plans to add two components to the department’s recidivism reduction efforts: a social work element to support the development of individual, achievable reentry case plans, and counseling to address coping skills and family issues; and a Parent Partner piece to provide both in-custody and post-custody support for families of targeted youth. The addition of the PREP project will provide for systematic and coordinated reentry support services for youth released from the Fresno County’s Juvenile Justice Campus.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council in **Colorado** has had to shift its funding from direct service programs to broader system improvement efforts over the years due to decreased funding.

Despite this decrease, they have established committees to address six main areas for improvement: Low Risk High Need; Professional Development; Evidence-Based Programs and Practices; Research and Evaluation; and Juvenile Justice Code Review. Due to its commitment to youth involvement in finding and implementing improvements to Colorado's juvenile justice system, they also created a seventh committee, the Emerging Leaders Committee. The Council provides the Emerging Leaders with financial and staff support to meet its identified priorities. Will Hays, Colorado's State Advisory Group Chair, notes that a reduction or elimination of JJDP funding would greatly impact the system improvement efforts of the Council and each of their committees.

In **Georgia**, the Honorable Steve Teske, Chief Judge of Clayton County and National Chair of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, reports that JJDP funding has been used to provide effective community-based programs that have reduced the need for incarceration, and have reduced the number of delinquent filings (meaning a reduction in recidivism). This has proven advantageous to youth of color who have benefited from these programs thereby working to reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Hawaii has utilized funding through the JJDP to launch alternative detention, probation, and diversion programs for youth in order to prevent youth from entering or going deeper into the juvenile justice system.

The **Idaho** Juvenile Justice Commission uses its Title II funding to implement evidenced-based programming, including programs in rural areas and programs focused on gang prevention and intervention. Title II funding has also helped the state focus on diverting low-risk offenders from further and costlier involvement in the justice system.

The Youth Strong Initiative in **Kentucky** recently received a \$174,410 grant to focus on prevention areas, particularly mentoring and parental training. With the funding, the Youth Strong Initiative plans to enhance existing youth mentoring by adults; a peer mentoring element called Sources of Strength; and a parenting program called Guiding Good Choices and Staying Connected with Your Teen to address family needs. Thanks to this funding, the program will be able to reach out to more adults to be mentors and more youth to participate.

Massachusetts will use its Title II funding this year to support programs focused on alternatives to detention, diversion, system improvements, and addressing disproportionate minority contact.

Maryland invests JJDP funding into programs that help the state save money in the long run, including using funding to assist with diverting youth from entering the system and from going deeper into the system. JJDP funding has also helped the state to provide necessary trainings to grantees and advisory group members to ensure providers are providing trauma-informed care and approaching work with an equity lens.

Title II funds have allowed **Maine** to begin expanding restorative practices throughout the state and complete a careful examination of their juvenile correctional facility. Title II funding has allowed the state to support many smaller efforts to improve direct services to youth and families. For example, the State Advisory Group has provided training to several probation officers regarding responding effectively to youth who are victims of sex trafficking. With Title II funding, Maine has also been able to execute both large systems improvements and improve direct service to youth.

In **Minnesota**, Title II funds have helped young people by rehabilitating young offenders, diverting first-time offenders and status offenders from the delinquency system, providing safe havens for young victims, providing culturally specific programming for young people, and embedding evidence-based practices in youth serving organizations. The funds help ensure strong and safe communities.

Missouri uses Title II for three main areas: (1) Statewide expansion of juvenile detention alternatives, (2) Gender-specific activities, and (3) Addressing disproportionate minority contact. The state has reduced

the use of detention and developed alternatives making decisions based on a standardized assessment. The funds have also been used to develop programs to meet the needs of girls and gender nonconforming youth. Title II funds have also allowed the state to create community teams to develop local plans to reduce the disproportionate number of minority youth at various points of contact in targeted communities.

Title II funds in **New Hampshire** have enabled the state to reduce youth contact with the juvenile justice system in favor of diversion protocols.

New York uses their Title II dollars to support nine Regional Youth Justice Teams, which bring professionals together across disciplines and counties to work cohesively on juvenile justice reform issues. The Division of Criminal Justice Services coordinates these local and regional juvenile justice system improvement efforts. Advisory Group grants have supported data improvement, needs assessment, and strategic planning activities to improve community responses to justice-involved youth and their families. Regional approaches and practices are shared with other regions and counties to promote best practices. Furthermore, funding supported the Youth Empowerment Academy, which trained justice involved youth in how to run focus groups on systems improvements. Trained youth ran four focus groups across the state and issued a report on their findings.²

The **Ohio** Governor's Council on Juvenile Justice uses JJDPA funding to provide opportunities for young people to rehabilitate and properly re-enter the general population with the necessary social skills and cultural capital to thrive. Without proper resources to guide them down this path of rehabilitation, the Council knows that recidivism is much more probable. Title II funds provide the best opportunity for the state's struggling youth.

Funding through the JJDPA has been critical in supporting **Pennsylvania's** juvenile justice system reform efforts and advancing evidence-based programs and practices at the local level. For nearly four decades, Pennsylvania's efforts under the JJDPA have focused on ensuring the safe and fair processing and treatment of its children and adolescents. The Commonwealth also has a proud history of full compliance with the Act's Core Protections. Projects funded by the JJDPA have, to date, trained 425 officers in 67 counties (or roughly 31% of 1,350 juvenile probation officers) in evidence-based, effective, cutting edge approaches to working with delinquent youth in ways that are equitable, fair, and targeted to their risks and needs as identified by a standardized and validated assessment instrument. Further federal cuts under the JJDPA will seriously undermine the state's ability to increase the percentage of their workforce trained on these evidence-based approaches.

In **Texas**, federal funds have been used to advance school-based delinquency prevention, job training, and critical treatment and rehabilitation programs that address substance abuse and behavioral health needs of our young people. Programs funded by the JJDPA in Waco and Bryan, Texas provide critical school-based diversions in lieu of citations, suspensions, or expulsions, which increase the likelihood of dropping out and becoming more deeply involved in the system. The Waco program offers alternatives to formal adjudication – a model that has worked well in other states and has had positive outcomes for youth in Waco. Funds have also been used to support gender-specific programming that targets the growing number of young girls who are impacted by the juvenile justice system.

In **Vermont**, Title II funds are critical to ensuring large numbers of children and youth can be served in community-based primary prevention programs. These funds have initiated systemic improvements to youth justice that have been sustained. For example, funds are used to provide effective restorative justice interventions for youth on probation, youth at risk and truant youth, and 'pre-charge' restorative interventions that divert youth cases from court. The funding has also allowed the state to implement statewide quality improvement, training, and best practice implementation for the Court Diversion

² NY STATE DIV. OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERV., ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2016 (2017), *available at* <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/pio/annualreport/2016-annual-dcjs-performance-report.pdf>.

system. Funding is also used to conduct studies and analysis for legislation regarding raising the age of jurisdiction, eventually leading to legislative change. While the funding has allowed the state to ensure their juvenile justice system is in compliance with the JJDP, the current allocations leave very little funding to make further improvements after requirements are funded.

With a new reauthorization for JJDP on the horizon, with bills overwhelmingly passed in both chambers, the need for federal support for this program is critical. It remains critical that Congress affirm this important federal-state partnership to protect children and to invest in innovative and cost-effective reforms that keep youth out of trouble and communities safe. The Act4JJ Campaign urges you to consider these critical supports for youth and communities in this year's CJS Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,