

JUVENILE JUSTICE ROUNDTABLE

November 4, 2009

BACKGROUND:

On Wednesday, October 21, 2009, community members and organizations representing all Wards of the District of Columbia, including currently and formerly incarcerated youth and parents who have been directly affected by the juvenile justice system, participated in a strategy meeting to identify & prioritize key “next steps” for juvenile justice reform in the District of Columbia, building off the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Juvenile Justice issued in 2001. [*For a copy of the report, visit: <https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/oakhill/documents-and-resources/blue-ribbon-commission/>*].

Over two dozen community-based organizations participated including The Alliance of Concerned Men, Beyond Vision, Inc., The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, COINNS, the Council for Court Excellence, DC Lawyers for Youth, DC Prisoners Project, Earth Conservation Corps, Educational Alliance Corporation, Empowerment Center, Equal Justice Works, Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative, Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop, Georgetown University, Growing On, Healthy Families / Thriving Communities Collaborative Council, KidsPeace, Justice for DC Youth, Latin American Youth Center, Mentoring Today, Offender Aid and Restoration, Parent Watch, Sasha Bruce Youthwork, See Forever / Maya Angelou, Youth Advocate Program, Youth Education Alliance, and Youth Village.

Additionally, several national organizations sent representatives such as the Sentencing Project and the Justice Policy Institute, and a number of juvenile and criminal justice system stakeholders provided support and guidance including the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, the DC Department of Corrections, the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and the U.S. Department of Justice.

The discussions focused on current and pressing issues facing the community such as children in custody at New Beginnings and other facilities, the need for community-based alternatives to detention and incarceration, the disparate treatment of youth of color in the justice system, and prosecuting youth in the adult criminal justice system and placement in adult jails and prisons. Participants shared their knowledge about the justice system and current initiatives underway, identified key issues and challenges, and strategized on a collective set of recommendations to put forward to DC officials.

On November 4, 2009, community members presented the following recommendations to DC officials for discussion at a Juvenile Justice Roundtable at New Beginnings.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT (DMC):

1. Take concrete steps to improve police-community relations, including having more community oriented police officers and officers consistently assigned to certain areas who can form relationships with individuals in the neighborhood;
2. Provide culturally sensitive and positive youth development training to law enforcement;
3. Increase government oversight of law enforcement agency practices, including consistent and regular data-collection;
4. Re-examine the practice of placing law enforcement in schools;
5. Strengthen judicial leadership in reducing the number of law enforcement referrals to the justice system, including increasing diversion from the system;
6. Involve young people in a meaningful way in policy discussions on these issues;
7. Increase support for advocacy such as kids' rights and holding law enforcement accountable;
8. Expand services & programs for youth such as after-school programs, community-based services and mentors for youth;
9. Strengthen oversight of the juvenile justice system so the community is aware of who is being arrested, detained and locked up;
10. Support research on how youth are treated disparately by the justice system (e.g. what happens to white youth in the juvenile justice system?) and data analysis of the decision-making points in the justice system, and publish these results publicly;
11. Increase parent and family supports;
12. Promote community involvement & ownership of the issues.

TRANSFER TO ADULT COURT & PLACEMENT IN ADULT JAIL OR PRISON:

1. Revise the “transfer” law to reduce the number of youth prosecuted in adult court by having all transfer cases be heard by a judge (i.e. eliminating the U.S. Attorney’s authority to prosecute youth as adults or by providing a “Reverse Waiver” authority for adult court judges to send youth back to the juvenile court);
2. Prohibit the placement of youth in jail (e.g. DC Jail or the Central Treatment Facility);
3. Until youth are completely removed from the adult jails, take the following actions immediately:
 - Prohibit the use of solitary confinement or lockdown of youth for 23 hours a day;
 - Require that all staff working with youth are required to *regularly* attend and successfully complete training by DYRS staff in age appropriate treatment and strategies for working with incarcerated youth under 18;
 - Remove the Department of Corrections from their authority over youth and replace with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services including managing the juvenile unit at the Central Treatment Facility (CTF); and
 - Advocate that the Bureau of Prisons place youth, once sentenced, closer to home (e.g. within 100 miles);
4. Require the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to report on the placement of DC youth once in the BOP system;
5. Increase monitoring of the Bureau of Prisons placement and treatment of DC youth;
6. Expand re-entry services for youth prosecuted as adults including mentors, Job Corps, independent living/ housing assistance, specialized empowerment programs for youth charged as adults, engaging social workers in providing services, and improved DCPS special education system and mental health services;
7. Require the U.S. Attorneys Office and the Superior Court to provide comprehensive and regular data on youth prosecuted as adults;
8. Increase and improve legal representation & advocacy for youth prosecuted in adult criminal court including requiring attorneys representing youth charged as adults to attend training;
9. Improve federal guidelines for treatment of youth such as requiring more educational and vocational opportunities while incarcerated;
10. Expand services for youth ages 18-24; and
11. Launch a new Blue Ribbon Commission with a focus on reviewing the practice of prosecuting youth as adults in the District.

COMMUNITY BASED ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION:

1. Make community-based alternatives to incarceration a priority in the budget and increase resources;
2. Increase oversight, transparency & accountability for community-based programming;
3. Expand community-based services and coordination of services to ensure a holistic continuum of care, availability of services to youth prior to release from custody, “one stop shopping” services, planning prior to release; support for parents and families; mental health and substance abuse programs;
4. Promote collaboration between all the stakeholders, including the Lead Entities, community based providers, and the relevant/ involved agencies – city and federal (e.g. CSSD, DYRS, MPD, DOES, DCPS, OAG);
5. Increase advocacy for youth and engagement of young people in the solution, equip and train young people, and include adult allies and youth together;
6. Promote a “youth development” model in programming; and
7. Recognize and promote the role of families.

INSTITUTIONAL CARE:

1. Reduce the use of incarceration as a response to juvenile crime;
2. Promote the use of small & therapeutic environments with individualized services for youth;
3. Place youth when appropriate close to home;
4. Expand discharge planning and re-entry services for youth; and
5. Reduce use of out of state placements for youth.