



MI Juvenile Justice: At a Crossroad for Fiscal Reform and Public Safety

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Narrative of Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this Michigan Family Impact Seminar. The topic of today's seminar is Juvenile Justice: Investing in Success. This topic is not altogether unique as Michigan and other states throughout the nation seek to address issues of public safety and youth in conflict with the law. The pillar of this topic is in keeping with the establishment of Juvenile Justice Systems in the U.S. To effectively address children and youth that have violated community trust by providing opportunities to reengage them to be productive and contributing member of our communities and state.

Like any aspect of human development, we all have ideas of what we can and should do with children and youth that are engaged in aberrant behavior. The challenge with this approach, however, is that what works for one child may be totally ineffective for another. As a state and a nation, we must invest in programmatic initiatives that benefit more children and youth in a cost-effective manner that produce positive outcomes. Consider some issues that Michigan, like other states in our nation face.

- While violent juvenile crime has remained steady and has not increased over the last decade, the number of youth formally involved in juvenile justice programs continues to increase.
- For decades now, states and local jurisdictions have reported that that youth of color enter and stay in the juvenile justice system with much greater frequency than white youth. For example, national figures show the rate at which black youth are referred to juvenile court for delinquency is 140% greater than for white youth (Knowll & Sickmond, 2010). Researchers (Blumstein, 1992; Piquero & Brame, 2008) have noted that contrary to popular belief, these trends cannot be entirely attributed to racially disparate involvement in crime. Rather, these disparities more accurately reflect the combined result of policies and practices that do not consider their racially disparate impact.
- Law enforcement agencies arrested more than 2 million juveniles in 2008. Although effective interventions to reduce criminal behavior have been developed and validated during the past 20 years, only 5 percent of eligible high-risk offenders currently are treated in programs that have been proven by rigorous research to be

effective. Many interventions and policies intended to reduce delinquents' criminal behavior have had the unintended consequence of increasing antisocial behavior. Effective programs are rehabilitative and use intervention techniques within youths' natural environments.

- In 2008, about 25 percent of juvenile arrests were for violent offenses (such as robbery, rape, aggravated assault, murder, and manslaughter) or property offenses (such as burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson).
- In 2008, of the youth eligible for processing in the juvenile justice system due to their arrests, 66 percent were referred to juvenile court and 10 percent were referred directly to criminal (adult) court.
- The most serious and costly outcome of a court referral following arrest is residential placement (for example, detention centers, wilderness programs, residential treatment centers, correctional institutions, and group homes). In 2007, approximately 160,000 juvenile offenders were placed in residential programs.
- It is estimated that there are currently approximately 2,574 juvenile offenders who have been sentenced to life without parole for their crimes. Only seven states have more than 100 youth that are serving a sentence of LWOP, accounting for 72% of the youth serving LWOP throughout the nation. The three states with the highest number of youth sentenced to LWOP are PA (444), MI (346), LA (335). FL (266) CA, (250), MO, (116), IL (103)
- Communities, including jurisdictions in MI, have funded and continue to invest in programs that are not only ineffective, but may also contribute to increased criminogenic involvement. Processing juvenile offenders through the juvenile justice system, transferring juvenile offenders to criminal (i.e., adult) court, shock incarceration (for example, Scared Straight), and residential facility placements have all been found through rigorous research and evaluation to be ineffective in deterring youth from becoming more involved in criminal behaviors.
- Surveillance of juvenile offenders, including probation and parole, doesn't seem to be detrimental, but there is limited and mixed evidence of benefits.
- Michigan spends hundreds of millions of dollars on juvenile justice services each year but does little to link funding with performance outcomes. Other states in the

Great Lakes Basin have shifted their juvenile justice funding to promote the use of highly effective, less costly community-based services.

- In MI, The County Child Care Fund (CCF) is a program within the Department of Human Services (DHS) that reimburses counties 50% for all CCF-eligible programs that serve neglected, abused, and delinquent youths. Although CCF is the only funding source that can be used for in-home care (IHC) services, the majority of the funds are used to pay for costly out-of-home placements.
- Why is this approach important? Consider what can be learned from the efforts of other states. Delinquency prevention programs can save taxpayers \$7 - \$10 for every \$1 invested, primarily in the form of reduced spending on prisons. In fact, Washington State found that doubling current investments in high-quality programming could eliminate the need for additional adult prison capacity in the future.
- The most effective programs at reducing recidivism and promoting positive life outcomes for youth are administered in the community, outside of the criminal or juvenile justice systems. Some of these programs have been shown to reduce recidivism by up to 22 percent and potentially yielding a savings of \$1,900 to \$31,200 per youth.

For years, policy makers have discussed strategies to realign resources in a way that creates an incentive for Michigan courts to use in-home care services – such as potentially increasing the reimbursement to 75% for programs that are proven effective.

As you will hear today, states that have implemented these kinds of community-driven models have achieved:

- Fewer youths in out-of-home placements
- Cost savings at the county and state level
- Reinvestment into community-based/ in-home care services
- Improved measures of youth well-being, mental health, and family functioning
- Reduced recidivism

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