

Juvenile Justice Initiative

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**New National Report Reveals that Non-Criminal Offenses Send Girls into
Detention Far More Often than Boys**

“Use Illinois juvenile reform opportunities to address these trends.”

Springfield, Illinois -- A new national report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation indicates that girls are far more likely to be sent to detention for non-criminal offenses such as technical violations of probation and status offenses such as running away and truancy. Nationally, in 2001, girls comprised 19% of detained youth, but 43% of those detained for status offenses. Similarly in Illinois, while 20% of those detained were girls in 2001, girls made up a higher percentage, 34%, of those spending time in detention for status offenses. A “status offense” is an offense that would not be considered an offense if committed by an adult (i.e. truancy, running away from home, curfew violations, tobacco and liquor law violations, etc).

“While the number of girls held in detention in Illinois is relatively small,” said Betsy Clarke, President of the Juvenile Justice Initiative, “every state is under a federal mandate to remove status offenders from our detention facilities – boys and girls. Too many kids spend time in detention when they pose no risk to public safety and could be better served in community-based programs,” said Clarke.

States that detain status offenders do so in clear violation of Federal Law. Under the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act [JJDP], states cannot detain status offenders; if a state does this in violation of the Act, they can lose federal funds. Currently, Illinois receives nearly \$3 million in federal funding under the JJDP and is in compliance. However, states like Illinois will soon be out of compliance with the Act if they fail to pay attention to this growing problem. A 2006 Amendment to the Act (HR 3402) requires that states conduct an analysis of girls’ needs in the system before planning any gender-specific services. “Clearly, Illinois needs to thoroughly investigate and provide a comprehensive continuum of services for girls in our system,” said Betsy Clarke.

Status offending girls end up in detention more often than boys because of girl-specific issues. For instance, girls are more likely to run away from their home or placement where there is often chaos, abuse, and domestic violence. “When girls are the victims of domestic violence, we need to provide them with a safe and secure place to live and services to help them get back on their feet. We should not be putting them in jail,” said Clarke.

Illinois is in a unique situation to address these issues because of several juvenile reform efforts underway. Alternatives to detention continue to be expanded across the state through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), a fiscal incentive program to develop local alternative programs aimed at reducing pre-trial incarceration in juvenile detention facilities. The program, developed first in Cook County through the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was expanded across the state

through federal dollars distributed by the Illinois State Advisory Group [Juvenile Justice Commission], with technical assistance provided through the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Most of the Commission funds are now completed and counties are picking up the funding in some sites. The foundation continues to fund technical assistance through a JDAI Partnership run through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. JDAI programs exist in Cook, Lake, DuPage, Winnebago, Stephenson, Jo Davies, Carroll, Ogle, Lee, LaSalle, Peoria, Christian, Shelby, Montgomery, Madison, St. Clair, Clinton, Bond, Fayette, Effingham, Marion, Clay, Jasper & the 2nd Judicial Circuit.

Illinois has also developed and implemented model legislation to remove fiscal incentives to commit youth to expensive state-funded correctional facilities rather than utilize more effective and less costly locally funded programs. Redeploy Illinois was developed through a coalition of organizations such as John Howard Association, Metropolis 2020 and Juvenile Justice Initiative. The program was passed by the General Assembly in 2004 as a pilot program and funded again in fiscal year 2006. There are currently four pilot sites (Macon County, 2nd Judicial Circuit in southern Illinois, Peoria County, and St. Clair County). To date, the 18 month old program has been extremely successful. Projected year one reductions in corrections commitments in the four pilot sites average 33%. This will represent a significant savings in state dollars, since corrections beds average over \$70,000 annually, while these community-based Redeploy programs are significantly less costly, ranging in some sites from \$3,600 to \$6,167 per youth.

Last fall, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation and the Governor signed it in to law that creates a new Department of Juvenile Justice. This initiative removes the Juvenile Division from the Illinois Department of Corrections and separates it from adult corrections. This effort will enable Illinois to revamp juvenile correctional centers into treatment centers. The new agency will begin operation on July 1, 2006, and is currently conducting a national search for a Director. A transition team is underway that will prepare a plan for the new department, and one of the areas of opportunities is to look at gender-specific programming.

Through these types of initiatives, Illinois is undergoing the hard work of juvenile reform and building a comprehensive continuum of services. Gender-specific programming must be part of these programs to ensure that the trend of detaining youth – boys and girls – and incarceration continues to decrease while treatment-oriented community-based programming continues to increase. The preliminary results from these initiatives are very positive; a resounding call to continue to reform lives.

The full national report, “Detention Reform and Girls: Challenges and Solutions,” can be viewed on the Annie E. Casey Foundation website: http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/jdai_pathways_girls.pdf

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