



National Juvenile Justice Network



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release on January 27, 2009

Contact: Annie Balck, National Juvenile Justice Network, 202-467-0864 x124 (w),
703-371-1067 (c)

NEW PUBLICATION CATALOGS JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORMS NATIONWIDE

Advocates Say Reforms Demonstrate Move Toward Cost-Effective Ways to Increase Positive Outcomes for Youth and Communities

Washington, D.C. – The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) released today its third edition of “Advances in Juvenile Justice Reform,” cataloging what advocates call “a swelling wave of acknowledgement” that the current juvenile justice system is harmful to children, public safety, and state budgets. Although the United States still leads the world in its punitive approach toward youth in the juvenile justice system, this publication includes an array of reforms that occurred over the last year and a half, many of which reallocate funds to more sensible and cost-effective means of rehabilitating youth and increasing public safety.

Highlighted reforms include newly passed state and federal laws, administrative policy changes, judicial decisions, and new funding allocations that have led to the closure of large, harmful juvenile prisons; increases in programs that offer community-based alternatives to confinement; strengthened practice standards for juvenile defenders; and additional procedural and substantive protections for youth in and out of court. By documenting these reforms, NJJN hopes to recognize and publicize the progress being made throughout the country in creating a more just, humane, and age-appropriate juvenile justice system.

“For years we have documented the damaging impact of our country’s punitive approach towards children in the juvenile justice system. Now we see states returning to the original promise of the juvenile court,” says Betsy Clarke, co-chair of NJJN. “It is encouraging to see that these reforms have led to better and safer outcomes for so many youth and their communities through the use of evidence- and community-based programs that focus on prevention, education and skill building.”

The document also includes a new section, “Promising Commissions and Studies,” that focuses on a range of government-sponsored efforts which are frequently precursors to concrete, instituted reform. For example, the state of New York created a Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice to examine ways to improve the state’s juvenile justice system

and develop a strategic blueprint for transformation, including ways to improve mental health and substance abuse treatment for juveniles. The task force will issue its recommendations by September 2009, allowing the state to move forward in the reform process.

According to Abby Anderson, co-chair of NJJN, while many of these reforms were instituted before the current financial crisis, it is important to emphasize that one of the many benefits of reforming the current system is the significant cost savings that can be achieved.

“This is documented proof that states must stop wasteful spending on archaic and expensive juvenile prisons, which can cost as much as \$800 a day, or more than \$290,000 per year to house just one youth,” said Anderson. “Not only are these practices expensive, but they are also ineffective. Once incarcerated, the chances of a youth actually being rehabilitated when he or she leaves the facility are slim.”

The report also shows changes on the sentencing and adjudication front, with fewer states transferring youth into the adult court and some giving discretion back to juvenile court judges. States are following the example of Connecticut and others, removing mandatory transfer and sentencing laws and moving towards raising their age of juvenile court jurisdiction to eighteen. States are also improving their indigent defense systems, juvenile confidentiality protections, and treatment of juvenile sex offenders.

The members of NJJN work steadily towards reform of the juvenile justice systems in their states; many of the advances highlighted in the publication occurred in large part due to the work of NJJN members, who have demonstrated that juvenile justice reform results not only in more humane and just treatment of youth, but also in safer communities and less crime.

About the National Juvenile Justice Network: The National Juvenile Justice Network is a membership organization of state-based juvenile justice coalitions and organizations that advocate for state and federal laws, policies and practices that are fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate for all children, youth and families involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in, the justice system. For more information about NJJN, please visit www.njjn.org and/or email info@njjn.org.