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**REAUTHORIZATION OF THE  
JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY  
PREVENTION ACT**

**Testimony By**

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**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Human Resources**

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Chairman Martinez and members of the Education and Labor Subcommittee on Human Resources, my name is Vicki Burke. I am the Director of P.A.C.E. Center For Girls, a non-residential, community-based program for high risk girls, ages 14 through 18. Thank you for holding this hearing today, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before this Subcommittee regarding the young women in our country who are presently in the juvenile justice system. These young women are being treated as delinquents when they are primarily children in need of services (status offenders - runaways, truants, ungovernables, throwaways).

Historically, services to girls have not been given adequate attention in the juvenile justice system, since girls represent a smaller percentage of the delinquency population. Most juvenile justice programs have either locked girls away in secure residential facilities or simply ignored them. Young women are typically not locked up because they pose a threat to their community, but because juvenile judges believe it is somehow in the best interest of the child to incarcerate them or judges are constrained because there are no services for them anyway.

### **The Problem**

Communities can see the results of boys who have grown up in pain caused by dysfunctional families, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, or substance abuse. They act out by victimizing the community through criminal, sometimes violent, behavior. Communities, because they want to protect themselves, their families, their property, and their neighborhood, pay attention.

When girls act out their pain, they often are self destructive. They run away, become involved in prostitution, have babies, or surrender their lives to men for attention and shelter. Their pain is **silent and invisible**. The only victim a girl will leave behind is herself. Too often communities do not pay attention.

Since troubled boys are a threat to the community and they act out their problems in a visible way, they receive more attention and thus more services and opportunities than girls receive.

Girls are again victimized when they seek help because, there are so few resources available to them. Females are returned home or receive no services twice as often as males. Girls routinely wait longer than males to receive treatment, and the treatment they finally do receive is often less intensive and of shorter duration. Waits up to six months are not uncommon for girls. In a sense, girls are penalized, because they do not act out by committing a crime. Most girls who come to the attention of juvenile justice authorities have committed "status offenses," such as running away or violating curfew. These offenses would not be crimes if

committed by adults. These young women have been committed to lock up or secure residential facilities because they have violated a court order not to run away, to attend school, or obey their parents. Is it reasonable to ask a young women to attend school or remain at home if she is being sexually abused? Frequent runaways is a common symptom of past or present sexual abuse; these youth need treatment not incarceration.

In 1974, the Juvenile and Justice Delinquency Prevention Act required the removal of status offenders from secure institutions. The law was intended to benefit girls, who had previously been locked up in secure residential programs for less serious offenses and for longer period of times than boys. Service providers applauded the movement away from institutionalization, but pointed out that leaving the kids (primarily girls) to fend for themselves was not the answer. In detention centers or training schools, they at least had food and shelter. Now too many girls live on the streets or in unhealthy, exploitative or abusive environments because as most juvenile justice authorities and child advocates acknowledge there are very few services for troubled young women.

There seems to be a double standard in our society about young women. Public attitude seems to blame the girls for having these problems. Girls are labeled as "bad" for being promiscuous when they are actually recreating their earlier abuse or looking for someone to give them the love and attention they never received at home. Girls sometimes try to fill this void by having a baby - someone to love them.

There have been several studies that document the inequities of services between boys and girls including The University of Michigan Center for the Study of Youth Policy, "Programming For Young Women in the Juvenile Justice System", (January, 1991); The Virginia Department of Youth and Family Services, "Young Women in Virginia's Juvenile Justice System; Where Do They Belong", (December, 1991); The Florida Supreme Court Gender Bias Study Commission Report, (December, 1990); The Oregon's Girls Advocacy Project, "Comprehensive Statewide For At-Risk Girls and Young Women, (November, 1990); The National Council of Jewish Women, "Adolescent Girls in the Juvenile Justice System", (March, 1984).

Some of their findings are as follows:

- girls make up over half of the children in need of services (status offenders) category
- girls pose little threat to society
- girls spend more time locked up in secure, residential facilities and for less serious offenses than boys (i.e., violation of court order to not run away, to attend school, keep curfew, or obey parents)

- girls are not a focus in the juvenile justice system because more boys commit crimes
- most programs for girls are residential, but out-of-home placements are unnecessary for many girls and they often lack aftercare services offered upon return home. The University of Michigan noted the reason girls were placed in residential programs was due to the lack of community based alternatives although community based alternatives are the most effective.
- The Florida Supreme Court Gender Bias Study found that prostitutes had one common trait - they ran from sexual or physical abuse. They determined that not all incest victims became prostitutes, but almost all prostitutes were incest victims. They found that adult prostitutes had often started as teenagers.

Another study done by the Valentine Foundation, "A Conversation With Girls," (May, 1990), concluded that girls act out differently and need different programs than boys. They also found a strong correlation between childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse, homelessness, women in prison, and eating disorders. This study also concluded that most dropout prevention programs are geared toward boys.

Community safety is the standard upon which services to youth has been based, meaning girls constitute a lower priority than boys. Girls are far more likely to be threat to themselves rather than to the community. People seem to believe that the worst a girl is going to do is get pregnant, but the worst a boy is going to do is kill someone. This phenomenon tends to drive the system with the juvenile justice system devoting the bulk of their resources to males. Lacking a powerful lobby of agitated victims, girls programs are often the last funded and the first cut. Fragments of help are all that is typically offered to troubled girls who will become the mothers of our next generation.

Although it is hard to see the quite suffering and danger faced by our young women, their dilemma is our dilemma. When we throw away homeless, runaway, abused or neglected girls, we throw away a part of our future. There are costs to each of us when we are unable to see and help the young women of our next generation. We perpetuate a worsening cycle of generational abuse, teen parenting, delinquency and emotional dysfunction. In addition to these unquantifiable, human consequences, we also pay a high monetary price when we neglect these young women:

- \* 60% of all American families on public assistance are headed by former or current teen mothers
- \* An unwed mother is the most likely person to join the welfare rolls and the least likely to join the labor force

- \* The U.S. estimated that \$21 billion is spent annually for teen households
- \* Single mother families are the fastest growing segment of our homeless population
- \* More than 75% of people living in poverty are women and children
- \* Two thirds of the world's illiterate are women and girls

## **One Solution**

In 1989, in Florida alone, 49% of our child population was female yet girls were 77% of the child sexual abuse victims; 44% of the child abuse fatalities and 48% of those abandoned. Fifty six percent of the runaway and homeless youth were girls. Florida has the nations's highest suicide rate and ranks fourth in the nation for teen pregnancy. Ninety percent of our teen mothers are not in school and less than half of the teens who are parents before age 18 graduate from high school.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the need for services for girls was recognized in 1985. P.A.C.E. Center For Girls opened that year with the support of the juvenile court judges. The first ten clients were all status offenders who were locked up in the detention center for running away. All of the girls enrolled in P.A.C.E. have either dropped out or have been identified as potential school drop outs. Sexual or physical abuse is one of the most common problems faced by the young women who attend our program. Because of a myriad of social and emotional issues, they experience extreme difficulty in adjusting to a regular school environment. Despite the multiplicity of problems noted above, these disenfranchised young girls respond positively in a caring, therapeutic environment.

P.A.C.E., a non-residential, community-based program, serves the needs of female status offenders, delinquents, dependents, dropouts, pregnant or teen mothers who are ages 14 - 18. The program has provided comprehensive educational and social services to over 700 young women since inception. The intent of the program is the prevention of juvenile delinquency, status offenses, high school dropouts, foster care referrals and teen pregnancies. P.A.C.E. provides young women with the necessary skills to become independent, self-reliant and productive citizens in their communities.

## **Description of Services**

P.A.C.E. offers a comprehensive continuum of services that are specially designed to meet the unique needs of at risk girls. Attendance is voluntary and there are no charges for services. The staff/student ratio in each class is 1:10. Upon entrance in the

program, each student is assigned a staff advisor and advocate for their length of stay in the program to ensure the students needs are met and any problems addressed. The specific components of the program are:

- I. Education: Education is the core of P.A.C.E. and the key to bringing many of the girls out of broken homes, poverty, and low self esteem. Each girl attends school while at P.A.C.E. and works towards her high school credit diploma or the G.E.D. P.A.C.E. is a fully accredited high school credit program which includes remedial, high school credit and General Education Development (GED) Examination preparation. P.A.C.E. has a scholarship fund to assist with continued education for the girls after they graduate from P.A.C.E.
- II. Life Management: The P.A.C.E. curriculum consists of a five-part life management component which includes classes that are designed to educate, motivate and build self esteem. Areas of study include: health and physical fitness, life management, cultural appreciation, career development and home economics.
- III. Counseling: P.A.C.E. treatment plans are specifically tailored to each student. Individual and group counseling sessions are conducted regularly. Staff are on call 24 hours a day in the event of an emergency. Close communications and availability of staff to students are key in defusing many crisis situations.
- IV. Community Service: The enhancement of self esteem and promotion of self worth are integrally related to pride and involvement in a community. Therefore, P.A.C.E. requires each girl to participate in at least two different community projects while enrolled. These projects include serving lunch to the elderly, working with abused children, and helping with abandoned animals at a local shelter. These projects are also a way for our students to pay back the community for supporting them.

Although the average length of stay is seven months, the program is based upon individual needs, so length of stay can vary from four months to one year. The girls can not graduate from the program unless they are enrolled in continuing education or are employed. Additionally, P.A.C.E. has developed a comprehensive 3 year placement and follow-up evaluation component whether a girl successfully completes the program or not. The follow-up coordinator ensures that students continue with their education and employment.

## Recommendations

We urge the Subcommittee on Human Resources to address the special needs of this population in the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act by:

1. Directing the OJJDP to study girls in the juvenile justice system, the number of female status offenders who are put in secure detention, the disposition of cases, and any disparities in services based on gender.
2. Directing each state to include and address how they are going to provide services to girls in their plans and to report annually on their progress.
3. Providing funds for research and development projects that can assist female status offenders and delinquents.
4. Providing technical assistance to states in creating gender sensitive services and programs.
5. Ensuring court orders are not invoked in response to frequent runaways, sexual activity and truancy.

There has to be more services available to accommodate and address their special needs. Services have to be more gender specific. Girls tend to unload when they feel safe, but when placed in treatment programs for boys they clam up for fear of being laughed at or being victimized again.

If residential services are being provided, follow up and aftercare services have to be required when they return to often the same environment they were being abused or neglected in. Problems for girls are intertwined. You have to look at more than just teen pregnancy or abuse or homelessness or drug abuse. Services can not be fragmented to address an individual problem when they are all related.

There is a lot of fragmentation in states and between states trying to serve young women. Every one is working with good intentions, but in isolation. We need to tie in collaborative efforts and identify successful non-residential and residential programs that are addressing all of their issues and share with the each other. We talk about breaking the cycle, but we can not accomplish that without addressing the needs of the young women who are our future mothers. We can not continue to neglect this population.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are looking forward to working with you to ensure the juvenile justice system is responsive to all of our nation's youth.