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HEARING ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE  
JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION ACT OF 1974

PROVISION OF SERVICES TO GIRLS AND THE  
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

MARCH 16, 1992  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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THE NATIONAL COALITION OF STATE JUVENILE JUSTICE ADVISORY GROUPS

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ACQUISITIONS

Congressman Martinez and members of the Subcommittee:

This statement expresses the National Coalitions's interest and concern about providing programs and services for at risk and delinquent girls. As the only national organization that focuses on the juvenile justice system and one mandated by section 241 (f) (2) of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act of 1974 to advise the Congress "... with regard to State perspectives on ... Federal legislation pertaining to juvenile justice and delinquency prevention", the NCSJJAG is uniquely interested in this effort to begin, at a federal level, to look at the inequity in services provided to girls.

During this year in which the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is up for reauthorization, it is especially important to look closely at all aspects of delinquency prevention, at the juvenile justice system, and at all the children who become involved in it. This hearing is a first, comprehensive look at the special needs of young women and I would like to thank you for providing a forum in which these needs can be explored.

As we move well into the 90s, the problems faced by the youth of our country increase in type and complexity. This is especially true of those children who are "at risk" for delinquent behavior or who already find themselves involved in the juvenile justice system. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 has provided a means of helping the states and territories begin to address many of the significant problems which were the impetus for enactment of the JJDPA - problems such as incarceration of status offenders and putting children in adult jails. Yet, as we have defined these problems, and taken steps to correct them, we see many more which must be solved if we are to be able to say we are doing our best for our children. One of these compelling problems is the lack of meaningful, appropriate, adequate services for girls.

Those who have been intimately involved with the problems of delinquent and at risk children agree that the particular needs of girls have been overlooked. Most juveniles arrested and referred to the juvenile courts are boys. Boys commit most of the violent criminal acts. With the public attention being increasingly focused on the problem of violent crime, the resources available to combat juvenile crime and deal with the juveniles themselves are inevitably concentrated on boys. As pointed out by Professor Ira Schwartz in his introduction to a booklet entitled "Programming for Young Women in the Juvenile Justice System", the "needs and issues confronting young females continue to be neglected by policymakers and juvenile justice professionals who, instead, address public

concerns about violent juvenile crime, primarily committed by male adolescents."

It seems ironic that because there are not nearly as many girls as boys becoming involved with the juvenile justice system and because, when they do become involved in the system, it is more often for reasons which attract far less public attention and concern, or fear, little effort has been made to look at girls and their particular problems and needs. Yet, these girls and young women will bear and raise the next generation of America's children. The lack of services and programs addressing the particular needs of adolescent, at risk girls now will severely hamper efforts to break the cycle of problems which lead these girls to become truant, to run away from home, to become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, to become delinquent.

The result of this inattention to the needs of girls is twofold. There are very few community-based programs geared towards meeting the particular needs of at risk and delinquent girls and, as a consequence of this lack of services, girls often end up in training schools and detention centers for having committed only the most minor of delinquent acts. This unnecessary and truly inappropriate way of dealing with girls who become involved in the juvenile justice system is certainly contrary to the spirit and intent of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act and its whole thrust of emphasizing delinquency prevention and providing a fair and humane juvenile justice system.

A major impetus for enactment of the JJDPa was to end the inappropriate, unjust practice of incarcerating status offenders in secure facilities. In fact, since the enactment of JJDPa there has been major progress in removing status offenders from such facilities. Unfortunately, while there are more, though certainly not enough, community based facilities and programs in which boys can find treatment and services to meet their needs there are very few such facilities and programs for girls - not facilities and programs which can really address their special needs.

A comprehensive analysis of juvenile female offenders was recently published by the Task Force on Juvenile Female Offenders of the Virginia Department of Youth and Family Services. The report entitled "Young Women in Virginia's Juvenile Justice System: Where Do They Belong?" was published in December, 1991. It developed a profile of youthful female offenders, assessed the types and availability of programs, analyzed the state's residential learning center's programs and services, and analyzed public education/information strategies to assist young women and staff training needs to work with them. The report indicates that while females accounted for 22% of delinquent complaints they constituted 51% of all children in need of services complaints and one-quarter of all probation caseloads. It found that the girls often "come from families in which they have received little or no emotional

support and in which abuse and/or neglect have occurred." It also found that girls served longer periods of time in the state learning center for less serious crimes than did boys. Overall, the findings in the report are consistent with findings in other states in these respects. The report clearly supports what people involved with juvenile and at risk youth in other states have found - the special needs of girls are not properly met either in the state training center nor in the communities.

Girls need programs designed particularly for girls because they have particular needs. Many who become enmeshed in the juvenile justice system do so because they are runaways or truants. They very often commit these status offenses because they are trying to escape sexual abuse at home. Many of these young women are pregnant or are already parents. Due to these particular "conditions," there is a special need for community based services and programs to provide such things as sexual abuse counseling, pregnancy counseling, training in parenting skills, and child care. Very few such programs exist. Those that do exist have had remarkable success in helping those girls fortunate enough to be able to participate in them.

This success is demonstrated by such programs as the P.A.C.E. program about which you will hear today and several others around the country. The common basis of each such program is that each was developed in response to a perceived need, backed by careful investigation of the problems of adolescent girls in the different states and communities. Several of these programs are featured in the booklet previously cited, "Programming for Young Women in the Juvenile Justice System" and clearly show, through their statistics about the girls who have participated in the programs, that the programs do help the girls to make remarkable progress. They finish school, get jobs, learn to be independent, productive young women.

These programs for girls have demonstrated their value, but there are only a few of them. They must be replicated across the country as part of the continuing, overall goal of delinquency prevention and as a means to ensure that girls are not incarcerated for acts which certainly should not merit commitment to detention centers and training schools. The need is great, but private resources can certainly not begin to meet the need. There must be a commitment of public monies through the JJDP.

Where federal funds have been available they have been put to very effective use as indicated by a comprehensive report titled "Oregon Girls' Advocacy Project." The report describes a project funded through a grant from the Oregon Commission on Children and Youth Services. This grant provided for development of a statewide planning process including gathering of information about at-risk

girls in each county, detailed information gathering about current services, research on model projects serving girls in the state, and development of service-specific recommendations based on the findings. A newspaper, "Oregon Girls Advocate," attached as Exhibit "A" describes some of the programs and activities serving young women which now exist in Oregon as the result of the impetus provided by federal "seed money."

On behalf of the National Coalition of State Juvenile Justice Advisory Groups, and, indeed, on behalf of the young women whose interest and needs the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is intended to serve, I urge the Congress to recognize the special and essentially unmet needs of at risk and delinquent girls and help to meet them through reauthorization of and increased funding for the JJJPA.

Thank you.