

# ATTACHMENT A

## Youth in the Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice System: Follow Up Recommendations

Submitted by the L.A. County Children's Planning Council

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November 11, 2007

### Introduction

The Children's Planning Council (CPC) believes that the Los Angeles County juvenile justice system – with all of the component parts described in our April 2006 report – needs to be re-structured as an integrated comprehensive system that gives our young people, first and foremost, the opportunity to rehabilitate and have renewed opportunities at the same time that it administers justice. In other words, we need to recognize that juveniles are not yet adults, and they need help imagining and creating better futures for themselves, their families and communities. The goal of this restructuring process should be to create better relationships between the two groups that must work together to improve the juvenile justice equation — the community, including families, schools, community-based and faith-based organizations (CBOs), and law enforcement, including police, courts, attorneys and detention officers.

Although LA County has made progress in almost two-thirds of the 66 areas identified by the Department of Justice (DOJ) at the juvenile halls, it appears that an extension beyond the August 27, 2007 deadline will be needed in order to comply with DOJ standards in 23 remaining areas. Even full DOJ compliance, however, does not mean that youth are rehabilitated – it only means that detention practices in the halls meet national standards. We still need to implement the Probation Department's camp improvement plan, coordinate the efforts of County departments, work more effectively with cities and schools, and engage communities in effective long-term partnerships to prevent crime and improve transitions back home.

Juvenile felony arrest rates have gone down over the last few decades, decreasing pressure on the law enforcement side of the system, but pressures on the community side are more intense than ever – families are more concerned about their children, youth feel that they have fewer options and less opportunity to succeed in school or at work, and fear of youth and of youth violence is increasing. In a recent report, the Advancement Project described violence in the highest crime neighborhoods of the City

of LA as being at “epidemic” levels. Many of the County’s law enforcement agencies are working together on gang suppression, community policing and centralized intelligence systems to ensure that the most dangerous and violent youth are caught and detained. But even the most coordinated and effective law enforcement strategies cannot address the root causes of the difficult and challenging (“wicked”) social problems that give rise to youth violence – poverty, substance abuse and racism.

The CPC believes that Los Angeles County has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the current system, balancing detention and rehabilitation, and systematically rethinking community-based prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation. Several factors combine to create this unique opportunity for change: 1) advocacy from the Advancement Project, Mayor Villaraigosa, Chief Bratton, Sheriff Baca and other leaders to assure that law enforcement, suppression and detention are better aligned with community-based prevention and family support strategies; 2) adoption by your Board of a restructuring plan that should facilitate collaboration among County departments serving children and families; 3) flexible funding available through the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) and Title IV-E waiver; and 4) increasing recognition that the most effective community-based prevention and transition strategies are rooted in partnerships between government and communities, where government recognizes the power of community assets, invests in networks and relationships in local communities, and works to enhance community strengths by enhancing social capital. Leadership from County government is essential because County departments and their CBO partners provide many of the key prevention, family support and early intervention services that help youth and families focus on education, jobs and the support services needed to sustain them.

The fact that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation have agreed on shared goals to guide flexible funding under the IV-E waiver provides a timely starting point for countywide discussions that clearly need to go well beyond the two lead departments. Projected goals for LA’s waiver activities include: providing more prevention services, increasing the number and array of services that allow children to stay safely in their homes; reducing reliance on out-of-home care through intensive, focused, individualized services; reducing numbers and lengths-of-stay in congregate care; and reducing timelines to permanency. Many of the partnerships necessary to achieve these goals are the same as those needed to improve the juvenile justice system.

Changing the current system will undoubtedly cause discomfort, but temporary discomfort is a small price to pay when the lives and futures of so many of our youth are at stake. We believe that, taken together, the following recommendations can kick start a renewal process that is long overdue. Some of the recommended actions can begin immediately while others will require longer-term planning and collaboration. The CPC urges your Board to lead boldly by signaling an urgent need for change, encouraging your Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and department heads to partner with communities around implementation, and requesting outside expertise and help where needed.

## Recommendations

1. Establish charter schools and other innovative education programs and policies in juvenile halls and camps to expand educational options for youth. Pilot test different approaches and compare results achieved by different providers using a variety of instructional methods and philosophies. Use this opportunity to establish education as the top priority guiding all programming and interaction with youth, particularly in the camps.
2. Direct the Probation Department to ensure that the initial assessment for youth entering juvenile halls and camps is comprehensive, addressing all of the bio-psycho-social areas known to cause problems for these youth, and that youth are re-assessed at regular intervals. Special assessment protocols may be needed to assure effective intervention for youth in different parts of the system – those in halls and camps, at home on probation, or in suitable placement.
3. Separate the juvenile functions of the Probation Department and ask the CEO, as a first step, to include juvenile justice in the Child and Families' Well-Being Cluster, keeping adult probation in the Public Safety Cluster.
4. Actively engage youth, families and community stakeholders in community action research to identify problems, test new programs and track effectiveness.
5. Ask the CEO to analyze use of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) and other funds in supporting effective community-based prevention and intervention services. Probation and other County departments should support sustained partnerships with community-based organizations that successfully serve high need communities, leading to development of effective community-based alternatives for youth and families.
6. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department to report back to the Board on the progress of the WIC 241.1 Dual Status Protocol pilot project in Pasadena and implement successful practices in other courts.
7. Draft and adopt standards of legal representation for youth in the juvenile justice system.
8. Launch a comprehensive action-oriented planning and implementation effort to transform LA's juvenile justice system. The BOS should provide a vision for change that addresses the balance between community-based prevention/intervention and law enforcement strategies, and ask the CEO to develop guidelines for a longer-term process to engage all of the necessary stakeholders.
9. Create a state-of-the-art Research, Evaluation and Policy Institute to support improvements in the juvenile justice system, focusing on community-based prevention and early intervention as well as law enforcement, suppression and intervention

strategies. If effective, the purview of the Institute should be expanded to address other areas related to child, family and community well-being.

10. Standardize performance-based contracting procedures and streamline grant processes across departments.

11. Cross train staff from County departments and community-based organizations – add parents and youth to the mix whenever possible.

## Rationale and Discussion

- 1. Establish charter schools and other innovative education programs and policies in juvenile halls and camps to expand educational options for youth. Pilot test different approaches and compare results achieved by different providers using a variety of instructional methods and philosophies. Use this opportunity to establish education as the top priority guiding all programming and interaction with youth, particularly in the camps.**

As recent reports from the CPC and the Education Coordinating Council (ECC) have revealed, education is both the greatest hope for many youth and one of the areas most in need of improvement in the juvenile justice system. Performance data show that most of these youth have been – and continue to be – left behind. Clearly no one system can “fix” this complex set of problems, but many systems have to work together more collaboratively toward the shared goal of improving the educational programs offered to these young people. Attendance data also raise questions about whether all youth in juvenile halls and camps have adequate access to instruction. For example, a report from the Probation Commission summarizing school attendance at the Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall on April 24, 2007 showed that 14% of the youth at the hall were not enrolled in the on-site school and only 78% of enrolled students actually attended school. Commission comments show that youth in some high-risk units received little more than one hour of instruction that day, while the majority did not attend at all.

Charter schools offer considerable promise for the diverse groups of students in Probation facilities, especially if different educational philosophies and methods are tested with different groups of youth and results are compared over time to see which youth benefit from which approaches. Beginning with charter schools aligned with the specific needs of youth in various camp settings makes sense, but the underlying premise should be expanding the range of effective educational opportunities available to all youth – including during the school day, after-school activities, and re-entry to community-based schools after a spell in detention. Expanding educational options should include, for example, extending the school day, allowing for thematic instruction across subjects, incorporating self-expression through the arts, and assuring rigorous curricula (for example, the A-G college

preparation subjects now mandated by LAUSD). Maintaining high expectations could help give each young person a fair chance to excel in school, to discover their own strengths, and to catch up with peers in areas where they may be behind. Consideration should also be given to other innovative educational programs and policies, including, for example, after-school activities offered by community groups, joint ownership of education programs by schools and CBOs, innovative LACOE programming and oversight, school uniforms rather than military or incarceration-type clothing, and nutritious meals, which we know contribute to learning and can contribute to appropriate behavior.

The BOS should also join with the CPC and ECC to resolve the difficulties that currently prevent information exchange among school districts, Probation and DCFS. This is a complex area where local, state and federal barriers may all present significant challenges. The BOS should work with Judge Nash to resolve local barriers to information sharing, while at the same time addressing continuing challenges at other levels. The ECC has outlined a set of potential activities that include encouraging school districts to clarify the directory information that can be provided to child welfare workers, and clarifying the intent of FERPA as not prohibiting information exchange between schools, probation and child welfare agencies.

- 2. Direct the Probation Department to ensure that the initial assessment for all youth entering juvenile halls and camps is comprehensive, addressing the bio-psycho-social areas known to cause problems for these youth, and that youth are re-assessed at regular intervals. Special assessment protocols may be needed to assure effective intervention for youth in different parts of the system – those in halls and camps, at home on probation, and in suitable placement.**

According to Chief Taylor, preliminary results of a neurological assessment process at the juvenile halls show that about 58% of youth have co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders, while another 25% have mental health problems, 5-10% have previously undiagnosed (petite mal) epilepsy, and large numbers have previously undiagnosed learning disorders. The next logical step is to ask the case managers responsible for coordinating services for these youth to develop individualized case plans (with the help of a multi-disciplinary team if needed), track the delivery of services, and re-assess youth at regular intervals to monitor progress.

While a comprehensive assessment process should be the standard for all youth, it may make sense to target one camp or section of a juvenile hall as a pilot site in developing and testing the process. A multi-disciplinary management team should also aggregate results from the pilot test in order to “map” the service system that is needed to respond effectively to the needs of these youth. The team should analyze service access both inside County facilities and in community-based

settings in the home communities of these youth. The process should include both geographic mapping and “backward mapping” or historical analysis (Were the youth previously known to other agencies that might have offered better prevention options? What services were received by youth prior to this detention? Were family and community conditions important determinants of youth behavior?). Neither backward mapping of youth histories and missed opportunities, or geographic analysis of community service gaps, will resolve individual problems, but they could help to develop a better guide for restructuring the system. Geographic analysis would help to identify the “hot zones” or high need communities where the safety net is most frayed. Clearly, one immediate need is for community-based detention alternative programs, especially for African-American and Pacific Islander subgroups whose youth are disproportionately incarcerated.

In addition to motivational interviewing for youth, engaging families and CBOs in multi-disciplinary team assessment processes when youth are at-risk or initially entering the juvenile justice system is extremely important, since so many youth are arrested and released, or returned home while on probation. Family engagement strategies may be especially important for youth who stay in juvenile halls for only a short time. Chief Taylor reports that 12,000 of the approximately 27,000 youth detained last year were out within 10 days. As demonstrated in the DCFS Point of Engagement approach, a three-way partnership between the public sector case manager, CBO staff, and families at the point when the youth first encounters the system can help with more comprehensive assessment, family engagement and planning of individualized responses, as well as easing transitions back to family and community when youth have been in out-of-home care. The Title IV-E waiver gives the County an important opportunity to develop standards around three-way partnerships between families, CBOs and government; MHSA should also be considered as a potential funding source to improve collaborative practice on behalf of these high-need youth and families.

Appropriate supervision for probation youth who are in suitable placement settings is also important, since probation officers and group home staff need to work together to manage cases and find nurturing permanent homes for these youth as soon as possible. As noted by Chief Taylor and the Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA), appropriate caseloads are essential in order to assure that all youth with suitable placement orders have timely appropriate case plans and access to needed services. ACHSA has recently noted serious problems in timely receipt of case plans and Transitional Independent Living Plans, completion of the home assessments needed to allow youth to make home visits, and timely issuance of Medi-Cal cards. Your Board should continue to monitor these services closely in order to determine whether these youth are most effectively served by Probation, by DCFS, or by a new approach to combining the services of County departments and CBOs.

**3. Separate the juvenile justice functions of the Probation Department and, as a starting point, ask the CEO to include juvenile justice in the Child and Families' Well-Being Cluster, keeping adult probation in the Public Safety Cluster.**

The CPC believes that the CEO should reconsider the recommendation in the May 15, 2007 Administrative Governance Transition Report that Probation be grouped with departments in the Public Safety Cluster. The intensive needs of juvenile probationers and their families require that juvenile probation work closely with other child and family services departments, while adult probation functions align more closely with other public safety departments.

There are two options that should be considered:

- 1) Create a separate department of juvenile justice; or
- 2) Ask the Probation Department to identify leaders to participate in two clusters – one to take the lead for Juvenile Probation in the Child and Families' Well-Being Cluster and the other to take the lead for Adult Probation in the Public Safety Cluster – assuring that each has the authority to make commitments.

The CPC believes that it may be time for LA County to join the many states and localities that administer juvenile and adult corrections systems separately. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (King 2006),

“Thirty two states vest authority in either a social or human services agency (including the District of Columbia). Currently only 10 states administer juvenile correctional services within the adult corrections agency. This reflects recognition that the mission of juvenile corrections differs substantively from that of adult corrections.”

Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich eloquently expressed the reason for separating these functions when he announced creation of a new department in 2006: “The new Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice will give troubled kids the help they need to make sure a brush with the law in their youth doesn’t lead to a lifetime of crime and incarceration” (<http://www.idjj.state.il.us>). The Illinois plan includes individualized educational, vocational, social and emotional services designed to reduce the number of youth who return to the juvenile system; the department also provides transitional and post-release treatment programs, including counseling, mental health, and substance abuse services. Other California counties have also adopted progressive values focused on rehabilitation; for example, Santa Cruz identifies family preservation, family involvement, cultural competency, interagency collaboration and coordinated service delivery as the key values guiding its juvenile justice system.

While the CPC believes that the possibility of creating a new department has merit, we recommend immediate inclusion of juvenile probation in the Child and Families' Well-Being Cluster. This arrangement would facilitate collaboration with the health and human services departments that are largely responsible for community-based prevention, at the same time continuing collaboration among law enforcement departments on criminal justice for adults.

**4. Actively engage youth, families and community stakeholders in community action research to identify problems, test new programs and track effectiveness.**

The CPC believes that the County should develop one or more youth councils – including youth who were formerly in the system – to provide continuous input into decision-making around juvenile justice. Youth councils should be charged with conducting focus groups, interviewing individual youth involved in the system, and observing existing programs and services so they can provide feedback on what works from their perspective. By the same token, the County should develop one or more parent councils to help decision-makers better understand which parent support and education approaches are most successful and cost-effective. Parents who are coping with the impacts of changing social and economic conditions on a daily basis should be advising on both the content and delivery of parent information and education programs. Where possible, efforts should be made to build on existing structures – with the caveat that youth and parents should be encouraged to take active roles in making recommendations and participating in programs that will improve outcomes for incarcerated youth.

Current efforts to provide family support and education during visiting hours at juvenile halls – now available on Saturday visiting days at Barry J. Nidorf Hall – should be supported and these parents should also be invited to provide feedback on their experiences with the system. All materials that are distributed to parents and family members should be translated into Spanish and other needed languages. To facilitate this, youth and parents should be asked about all of the languages they use at home. It seems likely from the CPC's finding that only 2.5% of youth told Probation staff that they spoke a primary language other than English that some youth may feel uncomfortable reporting on their own and their parents' language facility.

A October 2007 report from the Education Coordinating Council cites data from a recent Probation survey showing that 240 females and 213 males already have or will soon have young children. Probation Officers for 86 of the female juvenile probationers reported that they were pregnant, and they reported that 367 juveniles already had young children. Given this reality, "parenting education" for incarcerated youth who are parents and for youth on community probation – both males and females – should be pilot-tested and information on successful models should be distributed widely. Recognizing that these young people play multiple

roles makes investing in their future, and that of their children, even more crucial – and it makes their feedback on what works even more meaningful. Both County government and CBO partners should reach out to the young children of these adolescents to assure that they are enrolled in high-quality early childhood education and family support programs. Collaboration between the courts, Probation, the Policy Roundtable for Child Care, funders and other leaders could make a significant difference in the lives of these young children. Preschool children whose parents are probationers and those in the DCFS system are arguably the most at-risk young children in Los Angeles County. County departments should work with Head Start, Los Angeles Universal Preschool and child care providers to assure their access to early care and education, and efforts should be made to seek funding for these services from First 5 LA, MHSA (especially Prevention and Early Intervention funds) and other funding sources.

Information provided by the youth themselves, and by their families, should be helpful in program development, implementation and evaluation, as well as workforce preparation and training. Perhaps even more importantly, however, reaching out to youth and families to invite their involvement signals to community members that the County is genuinely seeking meaningful partnerships.

- 5. Ask the CEO to analyze use of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) and other funds in supporting effective community-based prevention and intervention services. Over time, the Probation Department should develop processes that support sustained partnerships with community-based organizations that successfully serve high need communities, leading to development of effective community-based alternatives for youth and families.**

The State Corrections Standards Authority oversees JJCPA funds (originally known as Schiff-Cardenas funds) based on the County's Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan. Your Board recently authorized the Chief Probation Officer to apply for over \$32 million for FY 2007-08. These funds will address three goals: 1) decreasing mental health problems of probationers; 2) providing community prevention and intervention strategies that target high-need neighborhoods; and 3) achieving school success for probationers and at-risk youth.

State law requires tracking of the following outcome measures: arrest rates, successful completion of probation, incarceration rates, probation violations, completion of restitution and court-ordered community services, and annual per capita program costs. These measures define "success" largely from the perspective of the system, but the County also needs information on improvements in youth well-being. The CPC believes it is important to add measures of youth well-being as defined by the county's outcome areas – Good Health, Safety and Survival, Economic Well-Being, Social and Emotional Well-Being, Education and Workforce Readiness – to existing evaluation requirements in order to better track

what works, for whom and how much specific services contribute to different kinds of system outcomes.

In addition, we are concerned that only a quarter of the JJCPA FY 2007-08 budget was clearly earmarked for community-based services. For example, all of the \$10.5 million budgeted for mental health services will go to County departments (although some may be dispersed to CBOs). The total amount of \$12.3 million budgeted for school-based services will go to the Probation Department. Of the \$9.8 million budgeted for high need communities, \$7.7 million will go to CBOs, while another \$2 million will go to various departments of the City of Los Angeles and \$40,000 will go to the City of Long Beach Police Department. Thus, only 24% is clearly designated as being directed to community-based organizations.

Your Board should request additional analysis of expenditures in FY 2005-06 and 2006-07 to determine whether these allocations reflect adequate attention to community-based supports and services, lack of knowledge about the importance of community-based services, and/or disregard for CBOs as full partners. Analysis of other funding streams, such as the Title II Formula Grants and the Mentally Ill Offender Crime Reduction Grant Program, may also provide useful information. These analyses should include all funding streams available to support community-based services, the contracting processes used (including who makes referrals), all CBOs who received service contracts, the communities served, contract amounts and outcomes achieved. Mapping distribution of funding with community need factors should also underline gaps in the current system of services. This information should be extremely helpful as a guide for future budget planning and financial projections.

The CPC believes that planning for community-based services would be improved if information on the characteristics of youth who are arrested, processed and detained were available to community groups in each Service Planning Area on a regular basis. In addition to tracking the flow of youth through the different parts of the juvenile justice system, planning for rehabilitation and treatment requires that aggregate information about the youth served by the system be readily available to potential community partners. This information should be based on home addresses of youth (not only the jurisdictions of arresting officers), more accurate assessment of race/ethnicity (paying particular attention to American Indian status and Pacific Islander subgroups), preferred languages spoken by the youth and their families, educational status and assessment information (co-occurring disorders, learning disabilities, etc.).

Flexible funding available through the MHSA and Title IV-E waivers could play an important role in developing data-based planning tools, and testing new programs and approaches to community-based prevention and early intervention. Your Board should ask how JJCPA funds are aligned with these new funding streams to support prevention, early intervention, family support, education and community-based services for at-risk youth and those already involved with the juvenile justice system.

**6. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department to report back to the Board on the progress of the WIC 241.1 Dual Status Protocol pilot project in Pasadena and implement successful practices in other courts.**

While informal reports on the increasing number of dependent youth entering the delinquency system have raised concern for years, it has been difficult to get a handle on the scope of the problem because accurate data were not available. Introduction of the WIC 241.1 protocol has made it possible to gather more accurate data and to better serve these “crossover youth.” The DCFS Court Services Statistical Report for January through December 2006 shows that there were 1,197 Delinquency Court Disposition Hearings on cases referred to the DCFS 241.1 Unit in that year. Of these, 457 (38%) received a 602 disposition and 596 (50%) received joint supervision. There were also nine Dependency Court Disposition Hearings, making a total of 1,206 delinquency and dependency court dispositional hearings where dependent youth were also involved with the delinquency system. Because California state law required separation between these two systems, this special 241.1 protocol represented a major improvement in coordination between DCFS, which is charged with responding to abuse and neglect, and the juvenile justice system.

In response to Assembly Bill 129, which allows each county the option of creating a dual status jurisdiction, Judge Nash recently issued protocol guidelines for an important pilot project that will substantially improve on previous efforts. Protocol guidelines went into effect in the Pasadena Delinquency Court on May 15, 2007. The revised 241.1 protocol includes a more comprehensive assessment process to be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team that follows through by developing case plans, making case management decisions and tracking progress over time. Based on experience with the previous WIC 241.1 protocol, as well as extensive consultation among involved departments, this pilot test should provide important information on improved processes that should also be implemented in other courts as soon as possible. Based on what works in Pasadena, CPC recommends that your Board disseminate this new and improved model throughout the county.

**7. Draft and adopt standards of legal representation for youth in the juvenile justice system.**

During the course of the original CPC study and during this follow-up period, informants have stressed the importance of effective legal representation for all youth who get involved in the juvenile justice system, as well as helping youth and their families understand the legal system and the role of their attorneys. Perhaps most importantly, clear standards for legal representation would provide guidance for families who face a crisis when their children are arrested for delinquent

behaviors. Because legal representation may be provided by the office of the Public Defender, the Alternate Public Defender, one of the nine panels of private attorneys in juvenile courthouses, or by individual attorneys retained by families on behalf of their individual youth, there is room for confusion about what to expect from delinquency proceedings.

Effective intervention for these young people should include not only the services of an attorney who is trained and prepared to work with juveniles, but may also require a range of pre- and post-disposition supportive services. The special needs of these youth may be a result of living in very poor communities with under-performing schools and little access to community-based resources, and they may include substance abuse and/or mental health problems, undiagnosed health problems and learning disabilities, and previous run-ins with the law or with the dependency system. The overwhelming needs of many of these youth can make it hard for any attorney to do their job without help from specialists, social workers and other social service professionals who can help families find long-term answers to extremely difficult problems.

One example of successful use of supportive services is the Client Assessment Recommendation Evaluation (CARE) Project, one of the special programs run by the Public Defender, which has served close to 11,000 youth since it began in 1999. CARE teams of psychiatric social workers, paralegals, mental health and education specialists, and resource attorneys work with juvenile court Deputy Defenders in ten court locations to assess, support and provide treatment services for troubled youth. A recent review of over 1200 cases served between 2004 and 2005 showed that 76% of the youth served by CARE had no new criminal charges filed within a year of disposition.

The Public Defender estimate that they serve about 50-60% of minors directly, with access to the Alternate Public Defender limited to youth in Lancaster and the Juvenile Mental Health Court.

The CPC recommends that your Board direct the County to draft standards for legal representation that should be applied across the board to assure that all youth have the best possible legal representation, and to assure that everyone involved in the process has the same understanding of the complex issues involved in delinquency proceedings. In addition, your Board should request the CEO to analyze current arrangements for supportive services, and make recommendations on any improvements needed.

- 8. Launch a comprehensive action-oriented planning and implementation effort to transform LA's juvenile justice system. The BOS should provide a vision for change that addresses the balance between community-based prevention/intervention and law enforcement strategies, and ask the CEO to**

**develop guidelines for a longer-term process to engage all of the necessary stakeholders.**

Better information on youth and family needs should help to jump start an action-oriented planning and implementation process to address the many complex issues that have not been fully spelled out in this report. The focus should be on rethinking connections between different pieces of the system, creating bridges between organizations, integrating and aligning the functions of different players, and assuring that the workforce is ready, willing and appropriately trained to do the job. Facilitation will be needed to sustain conversations among the many health and human services entities that work with community partners on prevention and intervention for at-risk youth, families and communities in different parts of this diverse and far-flung County.

Consultants may also be needed to facilitate discussions between the many groups involved. Since the groups that work together around Child and Family Well-Being do not interact regularly with the law enforcement agencies that work on Public Safety – in fact, they often speak very different languages – special attention will be needed to assure that cross-jurisdictional communication is effective. One or more consultant teams with expertise in law enforcement, prosecution and juvenile justice, as well as community-based prevention, intervention and family support, may be needed to assist in planning and implementation. A very broad range of challenging topics will undoubtedly come up in these discussions, including power sharing, financing and facilities re-design, among others. When they do, competitive solicitation processes should be developed to recruit consultants with the necessary expertise and cultural competence.

Since your Board has recently directed the CEO and DCFS to integrate planning for prevention – aligning Healthy Communities, Strong Families, Thriving Children (HST) with DCFS’s Prevention Initiative – this may be a particularly opportune time to consider how the strategies needed to prevent child abuse and neglect align with preventing delinquency.

- 9. Create a state-of-the-art Research, Evaluation and Policy Institute to support improvements in the juvenile justice system, focusing on community-based prevention and early intervention as well as law enforcement strategies. If effective, the purview of the Institute should be expanded to address other areas related to child, family and community well-being.**

The CPC supports recent efforts by your Board and the Probation Department to rethink juvenile probation in line with the principles supported by research and evidence-based practices. However, we also believe, along with the Advancement Project, that LA should not only build on evidence collected elsewhere, but should take a leadership role in supporting research, and developing research-driven policy that can help to offset political divisions and perspectives. This will require

collaboration between many universities, foundations, think tanks and government entities that should work together on the pieces of this complex puzzle. Expertise on critical data issues – including performance measurement, cost benefit analysis, research, evidence-based and promising practices, and data on unsuccessful approaches – is at least as fragmented as the parts that make up the juvenile justice system. It is therefore essential that the County, cities and community-based partners have access to up-to-date information on what works in other jurisdictions, as well as advice from multi-disciplinary groups of experts on the many challenges that can limit progress.

There is increasing agreement that intervention should be based on evidence-based models, but the reality is that only a limited number of interventions have been rigorously evaluated using random assignment to experimental and control groups. Current quality assurance processes focus primarily on adherence to “model practices” that have been validated through randomized clinical trials, the most rigorous research methodology used to assess the impact of health and mental health services (programs with this kind of evidence are often referred to as Evidence Based Practices or EBP). Most people familiar with the difficulties of research on complex adaptive systems such as the LA County juvenile justice system believe that a much broader range of research methods is required to evaluate practices that don’t easily fit the “control” needed for random assignment – for example, building relationships with youth; mentoring and tutoring; safe management of dorms, showers and passages to school. In fact, evidence of “promising practices” that have not been studied through randomized clinical trials may be even more important to the County’s urgent reform agenda at this point.

Responding to the urgent needs of the youth in our care requires that the County and its CBO partners remain flexible, develop new programs, adopt best practices as they become known, and encourage community-based partnerships that can provide high-quality culturally-competent services for youth and families. In order to be effective partners, families and caregivers will also need information about emerging practices and how to continue treatment when youth return home. Involving families, youth and CBO partners directly in joint planning, assessment, case management and evaluation is the best way to assure information-sharing and continuity of effort.

Rather than create competing structures, the County should work with the City of LA, local universities, and other interested groups to develop a shared research infrastructure. Immediate issues include the need for standardized definitions, accessible databases, information on performance improvement, standards for measuring improvement, and short, medium and long-term outcome measures. Although there are a number of experts who could provide expertise and insights on these issues already working in LA County, there is no easy way to identify them, leaving each department to find its own way among many potential sources of technical expertise, often with little understanding of how to negotiate among competing points of view. Although this institute should begin by focusing on

juvenile justice, if effective over time the purview of the Institute should be expanded to address other areas of child and family well-being.

**10. Standardize performance-based contracting procedures and streamline grant processes across departments.**

The CPC recommends that the CEO, Deputy CEOs and Department Directors work together to standardize performance-based contracting across all child and family services departments. Many CBOs that provide essential resources for families and youth in local communities compete for and may receive contracts from multiple County departments. Rather than spending time on different, often contradictory, reporting requirements from different departments, these agencies should be freed to spend more time with youth and families, and less time on paperwork and reporting. The County should also standardize contracting practices to support flexible multi-year partnerships when organizations demonstrate continuing effectiveness. Flexibility in contracting might include Request for Information processes and the use of master lists of pre-qualified contractors. Any subsequent funding – new awards or renewals – should take performance in previous contracts into account.

**11. Cross train staff from County departments and community-based organizations; add parents and youth to the mix whenever possible.**

The CEO and department clusters should also address cross training around the essential competencies needed to deal successfully with youth and families. County departments and their CBO partners, as well as youth, parents and community stakeholder groups, should be engaged in local joint training sessions. Joint training of key County staff and staff from CBO contract agencies by region (SPA or smaller) would also allow for relationship-building and information sharing at the local level. Training sessions should include Probation Officers, Sheriff's Deputies, staff from DCFS, DMH, DPH, DHS and staff from local school districts, CBOs and cities, among others. Training should include presentations by parents and youth on what has worked for them, orientation to each participating agency, information on local resources, research on EBP and promising practices, and participation in community-based action research.

Core competencies should include knowledge of adolescent, family and community development, cultural understanding and skill in engaging families, relationships with people who don't think like you, and continuous development of multi-organizational systems. In addition, local specialists in neuroscience and trauma should be recruited to work with youth, parents and juvenile justice professionals to develop and pilot test training curricula to share recent neuroscience findings related to the possibilities for improving neural integration even when brain development

has been compromised due to abuse, neglect or trauma (Siegel 2007; Goleman 2006).

## Next Steps

This report calls for a number of immediate steps to improve the Los Angeles County juvenile justice system, as well setting the stage for longer-term change processes. In terms of immediate next steps, the CPC recommends:

1. Schedule a full Board policy meeting to discuss juvenile justice as soon as possible. This should allow adequate time to address the complex inter-related issues that have led to current problems in the juvenile justice system, as well as allowing additional community input to inform your Board's policy decisions.
2. Ask the CEO to come back to your Board with detailed plans including a timeframe, key participants, forums for community input, and recommendations about additional consultant expertise that may be necessary.
3. Ask the CPC to work with the CEO to monitor progress, reporting back to your Board on progress and achievements every six months.

## References

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