

December 4, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell and Representatives Pelosi and Boehner,

As former Administrators of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) appointed by Presidents of both parties, we are writing to express our strong support for reauthorizing the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) in the 111th Congress.

For thirty-five years, the JJDP has been protecting youth across the nation. Established in 1974 and most recently authorized in 2002 with bipartisan support, the JJDP is based on a broad consensus that children, youth and families involved with the juvenile and criminal courts should be guarded by federal standards for care and custody, while also upholding the interests of community safety and the prevention of victimization. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) provides for a nationwide juvenile justice planning and advisory system spanning all states, territories and the District of Columbia; federal funding for delinquency prevention and improvements in state and local juvenile justice programs and practices; and operation of a federal agency, the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), dedicated to training, technical assistance, model programs, and research and evaluation, to support state and local efforts.

As there are hundreds of different juvenile justice systems throughout the U.S. states and territories, it is critical that juvenile justice have a dedicated "home" within federal government to lead on national policies and to provide guidance and support to the states in implementing the JJDP. This "home", the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), carries out its purposes through research, policies and grants to states and localities to assist them in planning, establishing, operating, coordinating and evaluating projects for the development of more effective education, training, research, prevention, diversion, treatment, and rehabilitation in the areas of juvenile delinquency prevention and systems improvements. We have first-hand experience and knowledge of the critical role of the office having managed the agency.

Since the last reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, we have learned a tremendous amount about what works to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency. From the growing body of research on child and youth development, the development of the adolescent brain, and effective programs and practice, we now have more evidence about what works in turning these young lives around and correcting their behavior than we did a decade ago. Additionally, we have increasingly recognized the importance of evaluating programs in order to enhance their effectiveness and foster replication.

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However, our nation continues to face challenges in juvenile justice such as the over-reliance on detention and incarceration as a response to juvenile crime; the continued detention of status offenders despite federal prohibitions; pervasive racial disparities in the justice system; and the increased placement of children at risk of abuse, sexual assault and suicide in adult jails despite the JJDP's original intentions.

Reauthorizing the JJDP at this time underscores the critical role of OJJDP and affords us the opportunity to use and build on this knowledge to create greater justice for youth and to make our communities safer and healthier. We urge you to support reauthorization of this important legislation this Congress and offer ourselves as a resource as the bill moves through the legislative process.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of youth across the country.

Sincerely,

Shay Bilchik, former OJJDP Administrator (1994 - 2000)

John Rector, former OJJDP Administrator (1977 - 1979)

Verne L. Speirs, former OJJDP Administrator (1987 -1989)

Ira M. Schwartz, former OJJDP Administrator (1979 – 1981)

Robert W. Sweet, Jr, former OJJDP Administrator (1990 – 1992)

John Wilson, former Acting OJJDP Administrator (1993 – 1994, 1999 – 2001)