

DELAWARE JUVENILE JUSTICE ADVISORY GROUP

July 9, 2013

The Honorable Christopher A. Coons
United States Senate
1105 N. Market Street, Suite 100
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Senator Coons:

As you consider the FY 2014 Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill, I write to share the views of the Delaware Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, the advisory body of citizen-volunteers appointed by Governor Markell to improve Delaware's juvenile justice system under the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA). Our collective view represents the needs and interests of thousands of youth, families and constituents across the First State.

While we recognize the current challenges that come with spending caps and sequestration, it is essential that the modest federal investment in state efforts to prevent juvenile delinquency and protect those youth who come in contact with the just system be retained. In order to ensure that state, local, and private dollars continue to be leveraged effectively to promote public safety, prevent delinquency, and protect some of our most vulnerable children and youth, we ask that you support minimum federal funding levels in key juvenile justice programs as follows:

- **\$80 million for the JJJPA Title II State Formula Grants Program.**
For more than 35 years, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA) has provided critical federal funding to states to promote the prevention of delinquency and assist them to comply with federally-mandated core requirements designed to protect children from the dangers of placement in adult jails and lockups; keep status offenders/non-delinquent children out of locked custody; and address the disproportionate representation of youth of color in the justice system. Title II of JJJPA supports state compliance with these core protections and helps states to build effective prevention and intervention systems. While our request represents a \$10 million increase over the President's proposal, such a level would be in line with the true minimum costs of the Title II mandates and make up for deep cuts in funding to the states.
- **\$65 million for the JJJPA Title V Delinquency Prevention Program with no earmarks.**
Title V is the only federal program that provides delinquency prevention funding at the local level to reach youth at risk and help keep them out of the juvenile justice system. Despite the fact that Title V has been used to bring together law enforcement with other stakeholders at the local level for sustainable prevention efforts, in recent years it has been gutted and the funds

allocated for other than statutory purposes. This request is \$9 million more than the President's request and, without any earmarks or set-asides, would represent a significant federal investment in proven, locally-based delinquency prevention programs. Taxpayers save \$2 million for each child who is prevented from beginning a life of crime.

We also support the President's recommendation to provide \$20 million to help communities reduce the use of arrest and engagement with the juvenile courts that unnecessarily push more young people into the justice system. However, we believe this investment should not detract from the resources available to local communities through the Title V program, and ask that these dollars be appropriated separately.

- **\$30 million for Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) Program.**

JABG is used by states and localities to reduce juvenile offending by providing judges and other juvenile justice officials with a range of age/developmentally-appropriate options to both hold youth accountable and get them back on track so they are less likely to reoffend. These funds are used to effectively strengthen juvenile court services, such as behavioral health screening and assessment for court-involved youth and alternatives to detention. This request is consistent with the President's proposal and just slightly less than the final FY 2013 allocation.

- **\$20 million for Juvenile Justice Realignment Incentive Grants.**

As a complement to JABG, we commend the Administration for putting forward a new initiative, the Juvenile Justice Realignment Incentive Grants, to help states invest in evidence-based strategies that reduce youth incarceration and recidivism and promote public safety and better outcomes for youth.

- **\$2 million grant program for girls in the juvenile justice system.**

We support this targeted investment in a competitive grant program to help states and localities better address the needs of girls in the juvenile justice system. Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population and this program will help provide specific, targeted support for state efforts to implement best practices with respect to at-risk and system-involved girls.

Finally, in view of the tragedy in Newtown and the daily violence that plagues many communities, we are also supportive of the new monies allocated for community-based violence prevention using a multi-sector, public health approach.

Decreases in funding over the last few years have seriously impacted Delaware's efforts in addressing the serious problems in juvenile justice. While Delaware has had to rely on the minimum allocation of \$600,000 for most of the decade, the JJDP funding has been reduced by 33% to \$400,000 in Title II funds at present. The impact of decreasing JABG funding is more dramatic. In FY'09, Delaware received \$339,757. Those funds have decreased annually to the point where, in FY'13, Delaware's share of the funds is down to \$117,165. This money is used to support the innovative and effective gun court, school district-wide peer court reducing disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile/criminal justice systems, delinquency prevention programs in each county, and other evidence based practices and programs. The modest federal investment in these programs has been essential in supporting state and local prevention and intervention initiatives and improving public safety in communities across the state. Unfortunately,

appropriations for juvenile justice programs has declined by 50% over the past decade. In our small state, federal dollars are critical for leveraging other state and local funding to improve our justice system and implement effective reforms that keep youth out of trouble and communities safe. Additional federal cuts would seriously cripple these on-going efforts.

As you work to pass appropriations legislation for FY 2014, we ask you to ensure that juvenile justice programs receive the necessary federal funds to help Delaware continue to improve outcomes for youth and to protect public safety. We also ask that you work to restore some of the critical funding that has been lost over the last decade and include some new investment as recommended by the President and Administration in the FY 2014 budget proposal. Any less would move even further away from the targeted federal involvement that has historically provided critical national leadership to states in preventing youth from entering the justice system.

We thank you for your kind consideration and continued support. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience if you have questions.

Respectfully yours,



MICHAEL W. ARRINGTON
Chair – Delaware Juvenile Justice Advisory Group

MWA:s
cc: JJAG Members