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Mission and *Guiding Principles*

FOR

PENNSYLVANIA'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

PREPARED BY

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee

OF

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

- The juvenile justice system must make placement decisions based on an assessment of the juvenile offender, input from the crime victim, considerations of community safety and the “least restrictive alternative” principle. When out-of-home placement for juvenile offenders is warranted, placements should be made to treatment facilities that—when and as appropriate—provide for the continued involvement of the family in the treatment process.
- The juvenile justice system must provide effective aftercare for every juvenile offender in residential placement. Aftercare planning and services must begin when the juvenile enters placement and must include ongoing contact with the juvenile, his or her family, and community resources while the juvenile is in placement and following release.
- Timely and accurate information enhances the quality of decision-making and is crucial to an effective juvenile justice system.
- Sufficient data collection, data management and research capabilities are critical to system coordination, program monitoring, evaluation and proactive planning to meet the needs of the future.
- The juvenile justice system must continually increase the effectiveness of programs.
- The juvenile justice system must emphasize the development of comprehensive approaches to reduce the disproportionate representation of minority youths in Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system and as crime victims.
- Juvenile offenders and their families, crime victims and the community must be served by highly trained, competent and caring staff who are prepared to respond appropriately with sensitivity to individual and cultural differences and who treat all clients with respect, courtesy and dignity.
- All juvenile justice professionals—who serve crime victims, the community, juvenile offenders and their families—must be treated with respect and dignity, have clearly established expectations and standards for performance, be evaluated regularly and be compensated appropriately and fairly for their work.

A New Mission for Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System

In January of 1995, Pennsylvania’s General Assembly was called into special session to focus exclusively on the issue of crime. Act 33, which was passed during this session, significantly impacted the Commonwealth’s juvenile justice system. This Act set forth a statutory scheme that excluded designated felonies from the definition of “delinquent act” and placed them within the original jurisdiction of the criminal court. More significantly, Act 33 also redefined the very mission of the juvenile justice system itself as follows:

“... consistent with the protection of the public interest, to provide for children committing delinquent acts programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation which provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community.”

This new purpose clause in the Juvenile Act is rooted in the philosophy of “balanced and restorative justice,” which gives priority to repairing the harm done to crime victims and communities and which defines offender accountability in terms of assuming responsibility for the harm caused by his/her behavior and taking action to repair that harm to the extent possible. **At the foundation of this philosophy is the concept that crime victims and the community, as well as juvenile offenders, should receive balanced attention and gain tangible benefits from their interactions with Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system.** The philosophy of balanced and restorative justice is rooted in the following principles:

- **Community Protection:**
The citizens of Pennsylvania have a right to safe and secure communities.
- **Accountability:**
In Pennsylvania, when a crime is committed by a juvenile, an obligation to the victim and community is incurred.

- **Competency Development:**

Juveniles who come within the jurisdiction of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system should leave the system more capable of being responsible and productive members of their community.

- **Individualization:**

Each case referred to Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system presents unique circumstances and the response by the system must therefore be individualized and based upon an assessment of all relevant information and factors.

- **Balance:**

As appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system should provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition for accountability for offenses committed, and the development of competencies to enable juveniles to become responsible and productive members of their communities.

In response to recommendations presented to the Governor in 1997 by the PCCD Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (then known as the Juvenile Advisory Committee), the Commonwealth has developed a strong juvenile justice and delinquency prevention infrastructure that has helped to make Pennsylvania a national leader in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.

In 1998, the Committee adopted a mission statement and guiding principles for Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system in order to guide the operation of the system and shape system policy. This mission statement and guiding principles adopted at that time were based on the principles of balanced and restorative justice as referenced in Act 33. In the course of analyzing the current status of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system, the Committee determined that the mission statement and guiding principles developed in 1998 should be maintained and strengthened. The Committee’s re-affirmed mission statement for Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system is as follows:

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM OPERATIONS

OUR BELIEF:

Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system shall be driven by its mission, focused on outcomes, and measured by its performance.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- The juvenile justice system must provide developmentally appropriate and effective prevention, intervention and treatment programs.
- Every decision made—and every service offered—by the juvenile justice system must be designed to provide balanced attention to the needs of the community, the victim and the offender in an unbiased and fair manner.
- The juvenile justice system must have sufficient capacity, in terms of staffing and program resources, to achieve its mission.
- The juvenile justice system must have strong and responsible leadership.
- The juvenile justice system must have a stable and sufficient funding base that supports all aspects of service delivery. In turn, the system must be held accountable for the responsible expenditure of funds.
- Local communities provide the greatest resource in both preventing and responding to juvenile crime. The participation of community members and organizations in all aspects of juvenile justice must be encouraged and community members must be provided with basic information on the function of the juvenile justice system, its mission and guiding principles.
- The juvenile justice system must be part of a strong and integrated network of service systems, since neither the juvenile justice system—nor any other system—can address all the needs of victims, offenders, at-risk juveniles and the community.
- Educational failure often shapes and contributes to delinquent behavior. The juvenile justice system must work to meet the educational needs of all juvenile offenders and advocate on their behalf, with a particular emphasis on providing year-round education and training opportunities for youths in residential placement and a successful transition to the community.

- Ensure that parents and guardians understand the impact of crimes committed by their children.
- Require juvenile offenders, their parents and guardians to fulfill legal obligations to crime victims, the community and the juvenile justice system.

YOUTH REDEMPTION

OUR BELIEF:

Juvenile offenders have strengths, are capable of change, can earn redemption, and can become responsible and productive members of their communities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system shall:

- Assess the strengths, needs, interests and skills of juvenile offenders.
- Identify or provide resources to build on those strengths, interests and skills and to address those needs.
- Engage juvenile offenders in activities that develop measurable competencies designed to enable them to become responsible and productive members of their communities and provide the support and assistance necessary to enable juvenile offenders to successfully complete these activities.
- Assist parents and guardians of juvenile offenders in involving their children in activities that develop measurable competencies and/or which make a positive contribution to the community.
- Enlist employers, educators and others to provide juvenile offenders with opportunities for competency development.
- Enable juvenile offenders to demonstrate competencies.
- Engage juvenile offenders in activities that are of value to crime victims and communities.
- Increase opportunities for juvenile offenders to interact with positive adult role models.
- Operate a system that accused and adjudicated juvenile offenders regard as responsive, fair and just.

Mission Statement



“Juvenile Justice:

Community Protection;

Victim Restoration;

Youth Redemption.”

Community Protection refers to the right of all Pennsylvania citizens to be and feel safe from crime.

Victim Restoration emphasizes that, in Pennsylvania, a juvenile who commits a crime harms the victim of the crime and the community, and thereby incurs an obligation to repair that harm to the greatest extent possible.

Youth Redemption embodies the belief that juvenile offenders in Pennsylvania have strengths, are capable of change, can earn redemption, and can become responsible and productive members of their communities.

Furthermore, all of the services designed and implemented to achieve this mission and all hearings and decisions under the Juvenile Act — indeed all aspects of the juvenile justice system — *must be provided in a fair and unbiased manner*. The United States and Pennsylvania Constitutions guarantee rights and privileges to all citizens, regardless of race, color, creed, gender, national origin or handicap.

Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System

To define and determine the functioning of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee presents the following guiding principles. These principles represent the fundamental beliefs that should guide the overall operation of the juvenile justice system and be reflected in the nature of all programs and services provided. These same beliefs should shape policy decisions within the system, as well as relationships forged with victims, offenders and their families and the general public.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION

OUR BELIEF:

The citizens of Pennsylvania have a right to be and feel safe from crime.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system shall:

- Protect the community from known juvenile offenders—with a particular emphasis on protecting their victims—through a wide range of prevention, treatment, supervision and control options that correspond to the risks presented by individual juvenile offenders, and which include a continuum of sanctions, incentives and consequences that are developmentally appropriate and best suited to the needs of the offender.
- Reduce recidivism by juvenile offenders.
- Assist juvenile offenders in developing the capacity to act lawfully and responsibly.
- Structure juvenile offenders' time in productive activities that benefit the community and/or provide opportunities for competency development.
- Remove from the community those offenders who pose risks that cannot be managed effectively in a community setting.
- Assist parents and guardians of juvenile offenders in setting clear expectations for, and in monitoring the behavior of, their children.

- Encourage and support informal systems of social control—including families, schools, neighborhoods, faith communities and youth-serving organizations—in setting clear expectations for, and in monitoring the behavior of, children.
- Increase feelings of citizen safety and confidence in the juvenile justice system.

VICTIM RESTORATION

OUR BELIEF:

In Pennsylvania, a juvenile who commits a crime harms the victim of the crime and the community, and thereby incurs an obligation to repair that harm to the greatest extent possible.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system shall:

- Ensure that the harm to the crime victim and the community is understood and considered by the decision makers throughout the juvenile justice process.
- Inform crime victims about their rights, their cases, and the juvenile justice process.
- Provide crime victims with access to a wide range of support and services and enable crime victims to actively participate in their cases.
- Require that community service performed by juvenile offenders is of value to crime victims and communities.
- Operate the juvenile justice system so that victims of juvenile crime regard the system as responsive, fair and just.
- Ensure that juvenile offenders understand that crimes have consequences.
- Ensure that juvenile offenders understand the impact of their crimes on their victims and their communities.
- Hold juvenile offenders accountable for restoration of crime victims and communities to their pre-crime status, to the greatest extent possible.