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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New Report *Juvenile Justice in Rhode Island*

Significant decrease in number of youth at the Rhode Island Training School

Juvenile crime rates falling statewide and nationally

***Research shows evidence-based alternatives to incarceration
more effective than incarceration***

Providence, RI (June 30, 2014) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest Issue Brief – ***Juvenile Justice in Rhode Island*** – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, juvenile justice advocates, state agencies, and community leaders. The event was held on Monday, June 30, 2014, from 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Janice DeFrances, Director of the RI Department of Youth, Children, and Families, provided remarks. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst John Neubauer presented the findings.

The *Issue Brief* provides an overview of the juvenile justice system in Rhode Island, juvenile justice trends over the past decade, and provides an in-depth look at youth currently involved in the system. The *Issue Brief* also provides an overview of best practices for improving youth outcomes and community safety.

Steep decline in number of youth at the RI Training School

Between 2004 and 2013, the annual total number of youth in the care and custody of the Training School declined from 1,069 to 498. On April 30, 2014, there were 82 youth at the Training School (78 males and 4 females). Nationally and in Rhode Island, juvenile crime has fallen sharply since 1995. Between 1995 and 2011, the juvenile arrest rate fell 56% in Rhode Island and 52% nationally.

Youth currently involved in the juvenile justice system

- Of the 498 youth in the care and custody of the Training School during 2013, 85% were male and 15% were female.
- Girls in the juvenile justice system enter with different personal and offense histories and needs than their male peers. Girls are more likely to be detained for non-serious offenses and many have experienced traumatic events, including physical and sexual abuse.
- Minority youth are disproportionately more likely than White youth to be detained or sentenced to the Training School. On December 31, 2013, 37% of youth adjudicated to the Training School were Hispanic and 26% were Black, while making up 21% and 6% of Rhode Island's overall child population, respectively.
- Youth at the Training School face significant barriers to success in school, work and life. Many have mental health and substance abuse disorders, have reading and math skills below grade level, or have previously been victims of child abuse and neglect.

Community-based alternatives to incarceration

The juvenile justice system is responsible for ensuring community safety by promoting the positive development of youth in its care, while recognizing that children have different developmental needs than adults. Juvenile justice systems have a range of evidence-based options for monitoring and rehabilitating youth as an alternative to incarceration, including: Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care. Other alternatives include juvenile hearing boards, skills training programs, restorative justice programs, day & evening reporting centers, and substance abuse & mental health treatment programs. Alternatives to incarceration have been shown to be more effective in preventing recidivism and more cost-effective than incarceration for youth that do not pose a public safety risk.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) works to reduce inappropriate and unnecessary use of secure detention, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and improve public safety. JDAI promotes the vision that youth involved in the juvenile justice system are best served using proven, family-focused interventions, and creating opportunities for positive youth development.

In 2009, Rhode Island juvenile justice stakeholders joined in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to become a statewide JDAI site. JDAI in Rhode Island, which is coordinated by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, has focused on reducing unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure confinement, enhancing community-based alternatives to detention, and reducing racial and ethnic disparities.

"Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is proud to partner with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Family Court, the RI Department of Children, Youth and Families, and other community agencies and service providers on the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative," said Bryant. "Through JDAI, Rhode Island is focusing attention on the key strategies that we know will decrease delinquency, promote healthy development, and prevent future involvement with the justice system."

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* offers specific priority areas and recommendations to decrease juvenile delinquency in Rhode Island, reduce costs and improve youth outcomes in Rhode Island:

Preventing Juvenile Justice System Involvement

- Increase access to community-based prevention programs and family-based interventions that provide comprehensive case management and services to youth and their families, including mental health services, behavioral interventions, and substance abuse treatment.
- Ensure that high-quality after school and summer youth development and employment opportunities are available. Increase access for children and youth in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Schools and Juvenile Justice

- Ensure that all students in Rhode Island receive a high-quality education and learn the skills they need to succeed in school, college, and careers. For students who struggle, ensure that educational supports and special education services are available.
- Handle attendance problems and behavioral issues in schools in ways that re-engage students in their school communities. This is consistent with the state law that prohibits schools from using a student's truancy or absenteeism as the sole basis for giving a student an out-of-school suspension.

- Keep youth connected to their district schools while incarcerated and require school districts to reintegrate youth back into school immediately upon release.

Detention Reform

- Continue to implement detention reform efforts in Rhode Island, including JDAI.
- Expand the use of the Risk Assessment Instrument by police departments throughout the state to reduce inappropriate detentions.
- Increase the availability of best-practice diversion programs and community-based alternatives to secure detention, including juvenile hearing boards, restorative justice programs, outreach and tracking, and evidence-based programs such as Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care.

Improve Services for Youth Incarcerated at the Rhode Island Training School and Those Returning to Their Home Communities after Incarceration

- Monitor discretionary waiver motions to try youth as adults to ensure they are being used only when necessary.
- Reduce the secure confinement of girls at the Training School for wayward (misdemeanor) offenses, and instead address their needs in community-based settings.
- Ensure that girls who are victims of sex trafficking are not held in the Training School and are instead provided needed services through the child welfare system.
- Expand partnerships and connections between Juvenile Probation, other state agencies and community based providers to ensure that all youth who are on probation receive the services they need to remain safely in their communities and to become productive and responsible young adults.

Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities and Improve Cultural Competence

- Continue efforts to address disproportionate minority contact in Rhode Island juvenile justice systems. As part of this work, improve data collection and data capacity at all points in the system in order to improve monitoring of disproportionate minority contact and identify solutions.
- Agencies that serve youth in the juvenile justice system should hire, promote, and retain qualified, diverse, and culturally-competent staff. Translation and interpretation services should be provided to youth and their families so that non-English speakers are able to understand their rights and participate in treatment and other services.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.