

Testimony
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Senator Whitehouse, Ranking Member Grassley and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to appear today to testify about the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. (JJDP). In 1974, our own Associate Justice Edward Healey of the Rhode Island Family Court had begun discussions of how children involved in the Juvenile Justice Systems could be rehabilitated with new methods of treatments. He was a member of the Task Force to write Standards and Goals for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for the President's National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice and the Past President of the National College of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

The 1970's, 1980's and 90's brought many changes in the laws to protect juvenile offenders and children whose families were involved in child protection services. The Department of Children, Youth, and

Families (DCYF) became a separate department in which our State declared that we have a basic obligation to promote, safeguard, and protect the social well-being and development of the children of the State through comprehensive programs.

1. Bear in mind that in the 1970's, the United States were enmeshed in a war in Vietnam.
2. Feminists were demanding equality for good paying jobs.
3. The NAACP was actively seeking equality for people of color.
4. Congress enacted the JJDPA as the Office of Juvenile Justice, and Delinquency Prevention became part of the Department of Justice.
5. Rhode Island's Family Court which had been created in 1960 was housed in an old school building at 22 Hayes Street; the holding cells in the basement held adults and juveniles in separate cells which were next to one another. Children and adults could see one another and speak to one another. The Garrahy Judicial Complex was built in 1980. Today, cells for juveniles are

separated from the adult cell block. In 1981 the Family Court moved into the Garrahy Complex where the judges have their offices.

6. The Rhode Island Training School (RITS) has a new state-of-the-art building to house incarcerated youth in Cranston.

In the last 40 years in Rhode Island, there have been many changes regarding children in the juvenile justice systems; cases regarding status offenders, as well as wayward and delinquent youth, are heard at the Family Court presided over by an Associate Justice. The exception of some Family Court truancy petitions are those petitions which are heard in the schools where the Magistrates preside over the hearings.

Let me start by stating that as to issues strengthening deinstitutionalization of status offenders, I would like to explain that while the Rhode Island Family Court may advise status offenders that violation of a valid court order could result in an order for detention at the Rhode Island Training School, an order for status offender detention is rare; it's not a regular order made by our judges.

For detained youthful offenders, programs within the training school are geared to educating youth, while treating their social as well as behavioral health problems. Rehabilitation remains as the goal for all youth, whether status offenders or wayward or delinquent youth. With proper timely services, many youth have become upstanding members of society.

Youth who receive their high school diplomas are more apt to be employed. More than 10 years ago, special truancy calendars had been created by Family Court to ensure that Rhode Island's truant children attend school, to invest in their assigned classes in order to receive their high school diplomas. It is often said that detention in training schools is the pipeline to the prison.

Truancy Magistrates hold the truancy hearings at schools throughout Rhode Island. An electronic recorder who travels with the Magistrate means that there is a Court record of the truancy hearings. Often in attendance with the Magistrate are the truant youth, and a parent; the truant officer; school personnel such as the guidance

counselor; a concerned teacher or the principal. This is an opportunity for all interested parties to discuss a plan to keep a child in school; to address the provision of the best services to benefit the child's educational requirements, as well as social services, or services of other providers.

Funding from the OJJDP for the truancy calendars has benefited thousands of school children whose school attendance has improved. Let me explain that these hearings are all part of diversion calendars that are heard outside of the courtroom setting. By assigning hearings at the school, all participants are available to attend the hearing to offer their input.

Additionally, Federal funding for the Family Court's Drug Treatment Calendars have also been a benefit for more than 2,400 Rhode Island youth; this calendar is scheduled one day each week. Retired Associate Justice Pamela Macktaz has presided over this calendar, assisting youth and their families in overcoming the problems related to substance abuse. Experienced counselors work with the

youth and their families. The work with the counselors assures the graduation from the drug court calendar by using helpful and necessary social services to help drug involved youth combat the use of illegal drugs and alcohol. I am confident that I speak on behalf of all the families to thank you for funding programs assisting Rhode Island youth who have accomplished the program goals set to stop using drugs and to live a healthy lifestyle.