

Statement of Jeffrey Lind
Social Services Division Director
Beltrami County Health and Human Services
Before the Committee on the Judiciary
Regarding
“National Foster Care Month: Supporting Youth in the Foster Care and Juvenile Justice
Systems”

Chairman Grassley, Senator Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Jeffrey Lind and I am the Social Services Division Director for Beltrami County Health and Human Services I am here today to testify about our Dually Involved Youth Program and how it is changing the way we work with youth who have committed a criminal offence while they are involved with our children’s services programs.

Beltrami County is a large rural county in Northern Minnesota with a population of just over 45,000 people with approximately 9500 being American Indian. We have two Indian Reservations partially within the bounds of Beltrami County. The Red Lake Reservation, is a Non Public Law 280 reservation while the Leech Lake Reservation, is a Public Law 280 reservation. Beltrami County is also one of the poorest counties in the state and with poverty come other challenges such as transportation, affordable housing, limited economic opportunity and a high incidence of mental and chemical health issues. All of these challenges contribute to the high rate of children involved with child services and the correctional systems.

In 2013, due in part to a high incidence of child placement rates and our ongoing relationship with our tribal partners we were approached by John Tuell, a consultant with the Juvenile Justice Reform project from Georgetown University. We were asked to participate in the Dually Involved Youth Project (formally known as the Crossover Youth Project). Over the past three and a half years we have developed and implemented a program that integrates our child welfare and juvenile justice systems in an attempt to better serve this unique population.

Beltrami County has had longstanding issues with youth represented in both the child protection/child welfare system as well as the criminal/correctional system. Each of these systems are crucial in ensuring the safety and well-being of both the community and the child. However, when youth have the potential for dual-system involvement—e.g. the youth commits a crime and is currently open within child protection—these systems can create and/or compound challenges for the youth and family. Similarly, the disconnect between child protection and juvenile corrections can pose challenges for the professionals working with the youth and family. Workers may have different priorities that at times can have conflicting purposes. Additionally, either system may have experience and information relevant to the youth and family that could alter the services and/or approach provided by the other.

This project has changed how Beltrami County works with youth and families who find themselves involved with both child protection and juvenile corrections. It has improved the communication gap between the systems, and has moved toward a client-centered case plan that addresses the needs of the child and family. The Dually-Involved Youth Project provides a structure for Beltrami County to bridge these systems and offer effective interventions through collaborative and coordinated case planning, while understanding that each system has a role in fostering a safe environment for our children and communities.

While the Dually-Involved Youth Project is not solely about deciding *not* to adjudicate criminally involved youth, it *is* about recognizing the totality of risk and identifying the most effective interventions for each individual youth. Evidence-based practices are designed to do just this: They evaluate a client's risk for making poor choices; identify what is needed to increase the likelihood of the client making good choices; and ensure that the case plan for addressing these risks and needs makes sense for the client as an individual. Therefore, Beltrami County acknowledges that there will not be a one-size-fits-all approach when working with Dually-Involved youth and families. Each case must be considered individually based on the unique risks and needs of the client.

By increasing communication between the child protection and juvenile corrections systems and utilizing comprehensive, coordinated case planning, Beltrami County hopes to reduce both recidivism rates and costs associated with out-of-home placements.

The process we have identified is as follows:

- a. The individual youth is identified when the Beltrami County Attorney's office reviews a request for charges which are sent to their office by Law Enforcement. Once the case is reviewed the county attorney will make contact with the local social services agencies, in this case Red Lake Family and Children's Services, Leech Lake Child and Family Services and Beltrami County Health and Human Services to see if the youth in question is involved with other services.
- b. If the youth has open case with one of the social services agencies the county attorney will contact the assigned case manager to see if there were any extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to the criminal charges. This might include: a child experiencing a mental health crisis, a traumatic event that may have triggered the behavior or a child's disability such as autism. Any of these issues could contribute to a child entering the criminal justice system. After the county attorney reviews the case with the case worker she will then decide whether to bring the child to court for formal prosecution, or utilize an Alternative Response that best fits the youth and community's needs.
- c. If the county attorney decides that juvenile court involvement for an identified dually involved youth is necessary, the youth will be given a court date to address the delinquency charges. If the youth is found guilty and did not already have a probation officer (due to a prior offense) the youth and family will be ordered to participate in a collaborative conference. The purpose of this meeting is to assess the current risks, needs and strengths of the youth and family and to develop a set of

recommendations for the court to consider as the youth's probation requirements. This meeting will also address the roles and responsibilities of each case manager so as to avoid confusion for all parties.

- d. After the Court has ordered disposition the juvenile probation agent and the children's services worker will meet together with the juvenile and their family to complete a targeted Goals and Objectives form. This will provide prioritized steps to meet the youth and families unique risks and needs. While both the probation case and the children's services case remain open, monthly progress meetings will occur and will include the child, their family and both case managers. Goals and objective outlined during the collaborative conference will be reviewed. Any modifications to the Goals and Objective sheet will be discussed and when appropriate changes can be made that may better address the needs of the youth.
- e. There will come a time when one or both of the open cases will be ready to be closed/discharged. As the case moves toward closure a final monthly meeting will take place to ensure that all parties understand the changes in case management. If both the probation and children's services cases close simultaneously a support plan will be developed to help the family avoid further system involvement.

If at the time of initial discussions with the case manager it was decided that no formal charges are necessary, the county attorney may make a referral to one of several alternative responses:

- a. RESCU (Restoration, Education, Skills, Change and You)

A three hour, cognitive-base program which utilizes the Interactive Journal series, "Forward Thinking" and is focused on providing parents/guardians and their youth a safe place to discuss the young person's choices.

- b. Restorative Group Conferencing

A practice that acknowledges when a crime is committed, real harm is caused to real people and thus, all stake holders must be included when deciding how a person should repair the harm caused.

- c. Case Management through an Intervention Program Specialist (IPS)

A referral is made for case management services by the county attorney. The IPS case manager develops a contract with the youth and family to address the needs of the youth. If the youth or family do not cooperate with the IPS case manager or after up to 180 days have not completed the requirements laid out in the initial plan, the case manager may refer the matter back to the county attorney for prosecution on the initial charge.

What we have learned:

While we are less than two years into this project we do have some preliminary results. We have found that over half of the juveniles who get charged with a delinquency level offence have or have or at some point had children's services involvement. We have had 40 youth enter our

dually involved youth program and 49 youth placed in a control group (defined as having had past involvement in children's services).

We have improved our communication with our tribal partners particularly Red Lake and they have embraced this process on behalf of the families and children they serve. Currently we are working on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Leech Lake Band and anticipate moving forward collaboratively with them in the near future.

The primary component to the success of any of these programs is the communication that occurs simultaneously with the service providers and families in a supportive environment. By formalizing these processes we are seeing better communication between all parties.