



Embargoed for Release:

Until 12:00 a.m., July 27, 2009

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New *Issue Brief:*
*Juvenile Justice in Rhode Island***

PROVIDENCE, RI, July 27, 2009 – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its latest *Issue Brief* entitled *Juvenile Justice in Rhode Island*, at a policy roundtable with key stakeholders, state agencies, advocates, policymakers and community leaders. The event was held on **Monday, July 27, 2009** from **2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.** at the **Rhode Island Training School, Youth Development Center, Cranston, RI.**

At the policy roundtable, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released an *Issue Brief* that provides an overview of the Rhode Island juvenile justice system, with a focus on youth involved with the Rhode Island Family Court, those detained at and sentenced to the Rhode Island Training School, youth in Rhode Island on juvenile probation, and wayward and delinquent youth receiving community-based services in Rhode Island.

Citing data from the *Issue Brief*, Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT said, “Youth at risk of juvenile justice system involvement often come to the attention of schools, social service agencies, and child welfare systems, presenting early opportunities to prevent juvenile justice system involvement. In 2008, 5,242 youth were referred to the Rhode Island Family Court for wayward or delinquent offenses, and 1,084 youth were detained and/or adjudicated to the Rhode Island Training School.”

The *Issue Brief* summarizes juvenile justice trends over the past decade, as well as providing an in-depth look at youth currently involved in the system by age, race/ethnicity and other key characteristics.

The Issue Brief also presents research on best practices for improving youth outcomes and community safety. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT concludes the Issue Brief with a series of recommendations for decreasing juvenile delinquency in Rhode Island and improving public safety, reducing costs and improving youth outcomes in Rhode Island.

During the 2008 legislative session, the Rhode Island General Assembly instituted a cap of 148 boys and 12 girls on the Rhode Island Training School detained and adjudicated populations, and required the state to develop and implement a Risk Assessment Instrument for making more objective juvenile detention decisions with the goal of reducing unnecessary detentions. As of July 2009, a pilot detention risk assessment instrument has been developed and field tested, and implementation procedures are being developed.

During 2008, 29% of admissions to detention at the Rhode Island Training School that did not result in adjudications (sentences) to the Training School resulted in stays of two days or less, 72% resulted in stays of two weeks or less, and 28% resulted in stays of more than two weeks.

Nationally-proven detention reform efforts, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), can help reduce detention of juveniles in secured facilities, allowing them to be served in less expensive and more effective community based programs. JDAI works using a set of interrelated strategies, including: collaboration among system stakeholders, use of data, objective detention decision instruments, operation of non-secure detention alternatives, improving case processing efficiencies, improvement of conditions of confinement, safe reduction of special populations (warrants, violations or probation, etc.), and increasing racial/ethnic fairness in policy and case-level decision-making.

Rhode Island has been invited by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to move ahead with becoming a JDAI site. A group of core stakeholders, including the Family Court, the Department of Children, Youth and Families, the Public Defender's Office, the Attorney General's Office, the Rhode Island Justice Commission, law enforcement, community-based providers and youth development organizations have been working together to review policies and procedures for assessing which youth should be detained.

Youth at the Rhode Island Training School face significant barriers to success in school, work and life. Many have previously been victims of child abuse and neglect, have mental health and

substance abuse disorders, or face educational barriers. Approximately half of all students at the Training School receive special education services and the average reading and math skills of students entering the Training School were at fifth-grade levels.

Bryant stated, “Access to youth development programs, increased educational and job training opportunities, family support strategies and community-building efforts provide opportunities to prevent youth from becoming involved with juvenile justice systems and enable them to be successful in their homes and communities. All young people need caring adults, safe neighborhoods, effective educational opportunities and access to health care, including care for mental health issues.”

The *Issue Brief* offers specific recommendations to reduce juvenile justice systems involvement for youth at risk in Rhode Island, including: preventing juvenile justice system involvement through community-based case management, mental health services, youth development and out-of-school time interventions; improving educational policies that have an impact on the juvenile justice system and increasing access to high-quality educational experiences for all children and youth in Rhode Island; promoting detention reform strategies in Rhode Island; improving services for youth at the Rhode Island Training School and those on juvenile probation; and reducing disproportionate minority contact with the Rhode Island juvenile justice system. Bryant said, “The research is clear that improving juvenile justice systems, from prevention to detention, to incarceration and after-care, will improve youth outcomes, make our communities safer and save money in these difficult financial times.”

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