



**FY 2008 Revised Budget: Article 13—The Rhode Island Training School
House Finance Committee
February 4, 2008
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director**

Representative Costantino and members of the Committee, my name is Elizabeth Burke Bryant, and I am Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Thank you for allowing me to testify today on this very important matter.

Article 13 includes a cap on the population of the Rhode Island Training School. We are in support of this provision if the cap is accompanied by:

- (1) Use of a risk assessment tool used at the front door and back door to assess risk (i.e. risk of harm to the community and to the youth and risk of flight)
- (2) A trigger mechanism that would alert the Family Court when the capacity nears its limits and
- (3) The availability of high quality community based diversionary programs that would work with the youth as an alternative to incarceration.

In 2006, there were 1,056 adjudicated youth at the Training School during the course of the year, one-quarter of whom had been incarcerated previously. Many of the juveniles incarcerated at the Training School need special education and mental health services, and have been victims of documented child abuse and neglect. We are awaiting data that will enable us to do an analysis of the Training School population by type of offense. The data in the *2007 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* shows that of all youth referred to Family Court in 2006 (not just those referred to the Training School), 5% were referred for violent crimes, 10% for simple assault, 17% for status offenses, 17% for disorderly conduct, and 27% for property crimes.

The State of Rhode Island is investing \$73 million in a soon-to-be-completed new Training School consisting of two brand new state of the art facilities – a Detention Center and a Youth Development Center. The new Training School will continue to offer a full high school education program as well as career training programs specifically designed for youth. The maximum physical capacity of the facilities is 148. The cap of 148 for males proposed in Article 13 will help to ensure that the new facilities are not overcrowded and are capable of providing the services they were designed for youth who need a secure facility while at the same time diverting other youth to appropriate community-based alternatives to incarceration. National research has shown that high quality alternative community-based diversionary programs are both more effective at reducing recidivism and less expensive than incarceration.

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Diverting young offenders of all ages who do not need to be in a secure facility like the Training School to community based programs that work with young people to get them back on track is not only proven to be sound policy, but will also save Rhode Island money in both the short run and the long run. These programs are cost effective and are a much better way to address the needs of many youth who are now going to the Training School.

Other places that have succeeded in decreasing their incarcerated juvenile population (such as Cook county, IL and New York City) have relied on community-based programs such as home or community detention with ongoing supervision and support services, day and evening reporting centers where youth must check in on a daily basis with a focus on “high-crime” after-school and evening hours, use of foster care or shelter services, risk assessment and screening options for local police departments during evening and weekend hours to prevent temporary detention at juvenile facilities when not necessary, community-based restorative justice programs, and family interventions that help families take a lead role in the rehabilitation of youth offenders. Both the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the Vera Institute of Justice have significant resources and projects that would be useful for Rhode Island

I urge the House Finance Committee adopt Article 13 as long as the cap is accompanied by the use of a risk assessment tool at the front and back door, a trigger mechanism that will alert the Family Court when the capacity nears its limits, and the availability of high quality community based diversion programs that can work with youth who do not need a secure facility. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT pledges to work with the DCYF and the Family Court to develop a workable plan to implement the diversion program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on this issue and your commitment to the youth of Rhode Island.