



**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Panel on the Rhode Island Training School
February 9, 2009
Elaine Budish, Research Analyst
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

Chairperson Perry and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to testify today regarding the Rhode Island Training School and alternatives to juvenile incarceration.

Since it was proposed, we have supported the cap on the population of the Training School at 148 for boys and 12 for girls as a mechanism to reduce the number of youth unnecessarily detained and incarcerated at the Training School.

To this end, we have been working with the Department of Children, Youth and Families to support their efforts to ensure that the move to the new facility occurs in tandem with an increase community-based alternatives to incarceration for juvenile offenders in Rhode Island. We support the process they have created for the “back end” of the system to evaluate youth for early release and are confident that they are mindful of maintaining positive outcomes for the youth in their custody, including reducing the frequency of re-offending.

Based on the successes of other states in reducing a reliance on secure detention, we have been assisting the Department in the creation and use of a formal risk assessment tool (i.e., a tool that makes an unbiased assessment of the risk a youth poses for harm to the community, harm to the youth and risk of flight) for making the determination of which youth can be best served in community settings. We have already accessed significant technical assistance to support this work through the national Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Participants in JDAI use locally-developed Risk Assessment Instruments in combination with the development of community-based alternatives to detention to reduce the number of youth they detain in secure facilities.

Other places that have succeeded in significantly decreasing their incarcerated juvenile population (such as Cook County, Illinois 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.

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. National studies have shown that these programs are cost effective and when they are high-quality they can be much more successful than the use of secure facilities in reducing recidivism and addressing the needs of many youth who are now going to the Training School.

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

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

One Union Station
Providence, RI 02903
401/351-9400
401/351/1758