

5 Promises Campaign

Children's Campaign, Inc.



Protect Public Safety & Preserve Quality Programs

3 Point Plan

Prepared By:

Children's Campaign, Inc.
Roy Miller, President
Dr. Lawanda Ravoira, Senior Consultant
P.O. Box 1718
Tallahassee, FL 32302
(850) 425-2600
www.iamforkids.org

3 Point Plan

Protect Public Safety and Preserve Quality Services

It is our goal to help Florida face the current budget shortfall while protecting the high quality essential services considered necessary to address the increasingly complex needs of youth in the care of the juvenile justice system. Our focus is to protect public safety and hold youth accountable for their actions while keeping in mind that many youth can be served successfully in less restrictive and less costly community-based programs, as was presented in the *Getting Smart About Juvenile Justice in Florida* report (February 2008) by the Blueprint Commission.

We are putting forth the following 3-Point Plan:

1. **Reduce service slots and adjust per diems upward to serve the children posing the greatest public safety risks while also saving taxpayer dollars by diverting children through timely prevention, status offense and early intervention services;**
2. **Equitable funding reductions across the system of care inclusive of state-run and privately operated programs, and finding efficiencies and eliminating overlapping functions within the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ);**
3. **Continue existing services - whether supported by General Revenue (GR) or Non-Recurring Revenue (NRR) dollars - rather than funding expansions or new initiatives.**

Justification for 3-Point Plan

Point 1: Reduce service slots and adjust per diems upward to serve the children posing the greatest public safety risks while also saving taxpayer dollars by diverting children through timely prevention, status offense and early intervention services.

Justification - In their recently released report, *Getting Smart About Juvenile Justice*, the Blueprint Commission found that youth in Florida's juvenile justice programs have critical underlying problems that are at the root of much of their illegal behavior due to mental health, substance abuse and family crises. These children also have medically complex issues ranging from high rates of asthma, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, dermatologic and dental problems. According to a survey conducted by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), nearly 50% of the youth in residential and non-residential programs have been diagnosed with forms of mental illness and another 14% demonstrated behaviors that suggested mental illness. These issues are further exacerbated with 65% of the youth presenting with a diagnosis of or exhibiting behaviors consistent with a substance abuse disorder.



The *Annual Outcome Evaluation Report* compiled by DJJ reveals overall impressive success rates of diverting thousands of children through prevention, status offense, early intervention and diversion services. In a 2001 TaxWatch study it was found that services successful at keeping children out of the courts and detention (specifically CINS/FINS) saved taxpayers \$45-million annually beyond the cost of the services. This would result in \$450-million in savings to the state over a ten-year period.

Most recently, a 2007 DJJ report by **Bearing Point**, a consultant firm funded by the state, validated that juvenile justice programs continue to be under funded; for example, \$43 dollars per day short for moderate risk residential and \$45 dollars per day short for high risk residential and as much as 52% short in resources needed for mental health services, substance abuse treatment and vocational education and job training.¹

Point 2: Equitable funding reductions across the system of care inclusive of state-run and privately operated programs, and finding efficiencies and eliminating overlapping functions within the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Justification - During a period of budget reduction, the entire system must stay in balance and operate at a slower pace. A disproportionate reduction to any one part of a system will destabilize the entire system. In addressing the financing of state or privately operated programs and services, it is a fundamental principle of fairness that state run programs be handled equitably with those privately operated. In fact, if even tougher decisions must be made, attention should be directed to the recently released TaxWatch report, published January 2008, entitled *Complete and Accurate Costing of Residential and Detention Juvenile Justice Programs Is Needed to Properly Evaluate State and Privately Operated Facilities*, which indicates that state run programs are more costly to operate. Children's Campaign, Inc.'s analysis of available program quality reports shows that the higher cost of DJJ operated programs does not generally result in service quality that exceeds the private programs.

Point 3: Continue existing services - whether supported by General Revenue (GR) or Non-Recurring Revenue (NRR) dollars - rather than funding expansions or new initiatives.

Justification - In a budget crisis, preserving existing quality services must be our first priority. To fund expansions or new initiatives would result in deeper cuts to children's services and must be avoided.



¹ Bearing Point, 2007. Residential and Specialty Services Provider Rate Analysis