



Ensuring a Juvenile Justice System That Works for Michigan's Children

Summary

The proposal is to enhance Michigan's Juvenile Justice System by:

- Working together to make sure that all juvenile offenders receive a quality assessment,
- That treatment for juvenile offenders is guided by the assessment,
- That high-quality community based and in-home care programs are available statewide through technical assistance and rural grants from DHHS, and
- Ensuring accountability of juvenile services providers both in a local setting and residential facilities.

Why It Matters

Michigan's county-based juvenile justice system has many benefits, such as promoting innovation and allowing local decision-makers to invest in treatment that makes the most sense for their residents. But this system also poses challenges for consistency and accountability of treatment programs statewide. As a state, it is important to ensure that all juvenile offenders are receiving the best possible treatment at first contact with the criminal justice system. In doing so, we can improve public safety, improve the likelihood of success for the juvenile and be more efficient with our state and local resources.

Background and Statistics

Statewide data on this matter is not currently available for assessment. Absent robust statewide data, it is challenging to identify representative data. Anecdotally, we know that it is not at all uncommon for a youth to experience several failed placements, creating a costlier, less effective system. According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, for example, 79% of the juveniles at Wolverine Buena Vista had three or more previous placements in FY 2010 – 11.

While the data around the challenges we face is murky, the data that indicates success is not. At a local level, Livingston County has demonstrated how common-sense reforms and strong partnerships can make a big difference.

The results of improving their assessment and treatment models have been dramatic. The number of days youth were placed out of their homes was reduced from 12,827 days in 2011 to 4,393 days in 2014, for a 66% reduction. This means youth and families are receiving the support and treatment they need while still in their home, family, neighborhood and school. The resulting savings to both county and state have also been impressive. Considering both of the primary fund sources for placement costs for delinquent youth, the Child Care Fund and State Ward Board and Care, the annual cost reduction in Livingston County in 2014 compared to 2011 was over \$900,000, with the state and county sharing equally in the savings. The cumulative savings in just the first three years was over \$2.1 million.