

development and juvenile justice reform in the District of Columbia. In the absence of a unified youth development agency in the District of Columbia, the Commission is also urgently needed to assure that the District of Columbia comes into compliance with the fifteen year old *Jerry M.* decree.

The Youth Services Coordinating Commission is viewed as absolutely essential to overcome the complexity and challenges of the District's bifurcated juvenile justice system. It is also conceived as a much-needed support for the Mayor of the District of Columbia in management, service delivery reforms, and the community in its prioritization of children and youth.

Primary functions of the YSC Commission include the following but should not be limited in terms of the Commission's core duty to:

- Provide a knowledge building and governance framework to bridge youth development, juvenile justice, and other governmental functions responsibilities needed to maintain a seamless delivery of services and opportunities for youth across public and private entities.
- Establish and adhere to specific, measurable and time sensitive goals (i.e., reduction of school suspensions and truancy, review of recidivism data from the Court, policy guidance regarding services for youth in underserved populations and geographic areas of the city, and youth development training for all youth workers).

- Assure the District's compliance to the *Jerry M.* decree within two years; the timely demolition of Oak Hill, construction of a secure, state of the art cottage like facility, and the continued expansion of high quality community based programming and facilities.
- Coordinate policy and outcome based planning across agencies and maintain responsibility for the creation of innovative programs.
- Ensure the collection, analysis, evaluation and public reporting of youth data from a variety of contexts in the public and private sector.

With these objectives in mind, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommends that the following occur:

- Within thirty (30) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Mayor should establish the Youth Services Coordinating Commission by Mayoral Order and submit to the Council of the District of Columbia proposed legislation statutorily creating the Youth Services Coordinating Commission;
- Within thirty (30) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Mayor should appoint a diverse and interdisciplinary body composed of representatives from youth, government, community, academia, and the private sector to constitute the Youth Services Coordinating Commission. The Commission also recommends that the Mayor personally be present to Chair the body in its first year of operation. All Deputy Mayors should be members of the Commission. The Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, and Families would be the appropriate lead alternate for the Mayor. In addition, a "Whip" should be appointed to serve as an Executive Director/Chief of Staff.;

- Within ninety (90) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Council of the District of Columbia should enact a statute establishing a Youth Services Coordinating Commission, consistent with the principles and rationale outlined herein;
- Within ninety (90) days adequate appropriations for staff and composition of a budget should be given to the Commission to perform its functions.

Specifically, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission was developed in conversations held among Legislative and Governance Subcommittee members. Commission members of both Subcommittees agreed that the proposed commission should coordinate activities across agencies, as well as create innovative programs. It should also function as a highly visible and prominent body. While the proposed Commission should be responsible for establishment and maintenance of a focus on specific and measurable goals, Subcommittee members recommended that the Commission not be responsible for program operation. Ideally, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission will ensure that the broad recommendations by the Blue Ribbon Commission are implemented in an efficient and seamless manner through collaboration and cooperation the various stakeholders.

Two models for the Youth Services Coordinating Commission were discussed within the Governance Subcommittee. Primarily, debate centered around the role of community stakeholders, and whether or not engagement of communities broader than governmental entities might raise concerns about information sharing. Given that community support and involvement are strong

components to the success of youth programs, involvement from a diverse array of stakeholders with the establishment of requisite protocols was viewed as necessary for future success. In addition to outlining the overall function and responsibilities of the Youth Services Commission, the Legislative and Governance Subcommittees proposed that Mayor Williams serve as Chair of the Youth Services Commission and that he be personally present at all meetings during the first year of operation in order to achieve the necessary visibility and effectiveness. Moreover, all Deputy Mayors should be represented as well as an appointed "Whip" who will serve as the Commission's Executive Director/Chief of Staff.

In terms of potential membership, Governance Subcommittee members recommend that the Mayor create a broad and diverse interdisciplinary body, and that he invite a range of representatives from government, community, academia, and the private and youth sectors. Potential members might include representatives from among the following public and private entities: DC Public Schools, Youth Services Administration, Department of Parks and Recreation, Metropolitan Police Department, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health, Department of Child and Family Services, Department of Human Services, Council of the District of Columbia, Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, and Workforce Investment Council (WIC)/Youth Investment Council. Recommendations also called for representation from professional associations and organizations, including individuals from business, faith based groups (e.g. Inter-Faith Council), and social welfare entities (e.g. Child Welfare Consortium).

Finally, while the primary functions of the Youth Services Commission are to coordinate a policy vision and enforce accountability for strong youth outcomes, specific responsibilities

outlined by the Blue Ribbon Commission of Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform, the Mayor and City Council should also invest the body with the authority to take any action to bring the District into compliance with *Jerry M.* within two years. Adequate staffing and budget should be allocated or provided to ensure that necessary resources are given to the proposed commission. Overall, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission should be given the authority and power to monitor and coordinate the recommendations set forth by the Blue Ribbon Commission in order to promote strategies that overcome all barriers--- judicial, bureaucratic or otherwise.

### ***Guiding Principles***

In setting the agenda for youth services delivery, the Commission endorsed a core set of guiding principles for operation of programs and principles of leadership for child and youth-serving staff. These themes are viewed as integral to the preservation of a unified policy visions for juvenile justice and youth services in general. They include the following principles:

- There should be a strong emphasis on child and youth friendly workers. Workers should be exposed to ongoing professional training in youth and community development.
- Whether functioning in the public or private sector, youth workers should always function as child advocates.
- High quality research should guide programming and policy.

- Youth should be held accountable for antisocial behavior.
- Youth should have programming options that are age, gender, and culturally appropriate.
- The juvenile justice system must operate in a fair and just manner for all children.
- The District of Columbia- including the District of Columbia Courts, the City Council, District agencies, and local communities- should support safe and nurturing environments for children and youth in the juvenile justice system.

## Conclusion

Over the past year, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform has spent considerable time investigating community-based strategies to reach youth, as well as options to improve programming and the overall operation of the juvenile justice system. In addition to the identification of best practices in the District of Columbia, Commission members visited other cities and states to learn more about how other jurisdictions maintain youth safety. We have learned many crucial lessons, not the least of which is the discovery – or, in some cases, rediscovery- that we have many people in our own neighborhoods and in District agencies who love and care for children and youth each day. Youth and those who work with young people have occasionally affirmed the Commission’s impressions and, in other cases, opened a Commission member’s eyes about a particular need or challenge. Together, these various conversations have helped us to understand how to simultaneously hold young people accountable for antisocial behavior and nurture them in various contexts.

The Commission’s core findings cover three broad themes- youth and community development, programming in the juvenile justice system, and administrative and legislative oversight. Attention to the issues outlined below should enable us to address current needs and strengthen existing structures:

- 1. Critical data, information, and research related to recidivism, community supervision, probation revocation and other outcomes is needed to assess youth services and the juvenile justice system. Data and information must form the basis of**

sound policy and planning in every part of the juvenile justice system. The lack of critical analysis and research related to juvenile arrest patterns, diversion, recidivism, probation revocation, or characteristics of populations served is a major problem. Sometimes, data and information are being collected but not analyzed. Planning for youth services or quality programming in the juvenile justice system cannot take place without attention to important variables impacting child and family well being, community development and youth opportunities, and other measures related to the effectiveness of outreach strategies geared toward young people in the District of Columbia.

- 2. There is over detention and over commitment of juveniles. More diversion opportunities and home and community-based programming options are needed to keep youth out of the juvenile justice system.** Detention and commitment of status offenders, including PINS and truants, and other offenders, including UUV (unauthorized use of a vehicle) passengers and first-time drug users, provides an example of areas where excessive detention is occurring. Perhaps most importantly, diversion opportunities appear to be decreasing at a faster rate than the youth population. Given the poor state of juvenile arrest analysis, it was impossible for Commission researchers to analyze how multiple charges in bookings might impact diversion trends or how rates of population change among children and youth definitively correlated with arrest patterns. Diversion levels have recently eroded at the Superior Court, with the number of diversion cases falling from 690 in 1999 to 553 in 2000. MPD has consistently diverted about 300 cases per year over the past two years.



- 3. A stark racial and social disparity in detention and commitment needs to be analyzed to discover at which point in the juvenile justice system disparities may be generated and why they may be occurring. The juvenile justice system in Washington, D.C. is 100% African American and Latino, meaning that these youth account for 100% of those confined and detained. According to the most recent report from OJJDP, the District of Columbia is the only jurisdiction with 100% minority representation in residential placement. Given the disproportionate representation of these youth in the juvenile justice system, Commission members urge future study to assess the factors that have produced this marked disparity.**
- 4. There is a need for child and youth-friendly state-of-the-art detention (pre-trial/pre disposition youth) and commitment facilities, as part of a strategy to establish a seamless continuum of care for youth in secure and non-secure contexts. The lack of a state-of-the-art detention center in the District of Columbia, as well as the poor physical condition of Oak Hill, has contributed to poor programming, over detention and commitment, and a lack of coordination of service delivery for juveniles and families. In order to meet the needs of children and youth who enter the juvenile justice system at various levels of pre-trial and commitment status, the Commission recommends three courses of action: *first*, the demolition of the outdated Oak Hill Youth Center in Laurel, Maryland, once plans for a new rehabilitation and treatment model for child and youth friendly services is established as part of an Oak Hill sunset and raising of a model for smaller cottage and home-like treatment based model consistent with the William**

Woods/Rosa Parks model (see Appendix for photographs) and other individualized and specialized care options visited by the Commission in Missouri; *second*, the construction of a state-of-the-art detention center on Mount Olivet Road, with its proposed network of services and multidisciplinary assessment and treatment pods.; and *third*, continued support for the expansion of home and community-based options for placement of youth in their communities and neighborhoods. The Commission firmly believes that these steps are necessary to reform a fragmented juvenile justice system and ensure a seamless delivery of services for youth who may be in various stages of detention and commitment status.

**5. Blended sentencing will provide judges with more flexible options to promote rehabilitation and treatment among offenders who may be sentenced as adults.**

Blended sentencing affords judges with the flexibility to assign treatment in the juvenile system, but also the option to enforce accountability with an adult sentence if rehabilitation of a juvenile is not deemed successful. Contrary to some perceptions that the “flood gates” will open with the establishment of blended sentencing, several states- including Missouri with the lowest juvenile recidivism of any state in the country- have not witnessed an upward trend in adult certification.

**6. An end to direct file authority and the institution of transfer hearings for youth is necessary to establish appropriateness of rehabilitation for youth. Since 1970, the establishment of almost unchecked prosecutorial authority in the District of Columbia has enabled some youth to be tried as adults without a transfer hearing. Arguments that**

this strategy is necessary to address increases in violent crime are unfounded for children and youth in the District of Columbia. Indeed, there is no 13 or 14 year old juvenile “super predator.” The Commission supports an end to the direct file authority of the United States Attorney, as well as the institution of transfer hearings for juveniles.

- 7. Comprehensive strategies are needed to ensure that youth do not enter the juvenile justice system. An expansion of opportunities is needed to meet a need for critical employment, health, mentoring, and recreational services for young people.**

Children and youth represent the potential of any community. The Commission supports the design of more comprehensive community-based investments in children and youth as a first step to prevent exposure to risk factors for crime and violence. Recognizing that the city’s leadership team has ended receiverships in child welfare and other areas, it is critical that the city continue down the path of aggressive human service reform and public/private partnership. Youth must be afforded employment and academic mentorship programs, for instance, so that they may possess enhanced opportunities for occupational and social mobility.

- 8. In order to accomplish the goals for a new system of youth development and programming in the juvenile justice system, a culture change should be established requiring that all individuals working with youth adhere to youth development principles.** The Commission believes that youth development principles will strengthen professional culture in various agency and institutional contexts, which, in turn, will enhance programming and youth cultures in many positive ways. People who work with

youth must adopt the highest professional standards in order to ensure that young people do not fall in harm's way. This includes attention to programs that capitalize on youth assets and training of all youth service providers in youth and community development theory and practice.

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## JUVENILE CRIME

# Police Chief Lobbies For Access to Records

By PETULA DVORAK  
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Juvenile crime is rising in the District, and D.C. Police Chief Charles H. Ramsey spent yesterday afternoon trying to sell a D.C. Council committee on a controversial plan to help buck the trend.

Ramsey wants the case records of the most dangerous juvenile offenders — information he says is often unavailable to investigators because of privacy laws — released to his department.

"One out of every six juveniles arrested in D.C. today is charged with a violent offense, compared with one out of every 20 adults arrested," Ramsey said in testimony before the council's Judiciary Committee. "Today, it is not uncommon for us to see packs of three or four or more juveniles, some of them armed, committing street robberies in our city."

After a weekend in which five homicides occurred, including the shooting of a 28-year-old man on his porch by four teenage assailants, Ramsey said his detectives need better tools to track underage suspects who drift in and out of the juvenile justice system below the official radar.

Ramsey spoke on behalf of a bill introduced by D.C. Council Chairman Linda W. Cropp (D) that would give police access to criminal records of juveniles, home addresses of the juveniles and their family members and other sensitive information. Police would be able to find out, for example, about placements in group homes or juvenile detention facilities.

The records would be made available only for juveniles arrested three or more times or for juveniles accused of a single violent crime or unauthorized use of a vehicle, according to the bill.

The Justice 4 D.C. Youth Coalition — a group of parents,

youths and community advocates — criticized the bill as an unnecessary intrusion that could lead to police harassment. Other critics said they feared the confidential information would be leaked to the public, causing further harm.

Police can get the information they need on a case-by-case basis, said Joseph B. Tulman, a professor at the University of the District of Columbia law school.

The council hearing drew testimony from a group of youths who said the relationship between juveniles and police is already an uneasy one. The group said giving police access to their records could lead to harassment and prompt police to create lists of "good" and "bad" kids.

"Kids are supposed to get a second chance," said Larry Prescott, 16, a student at Caesar Chavez Public Charter School, who spoke along with other classmates.

Ramsey said police are talking about the youths who get fourth, fifth and sixth chances, because young offenders are usually on the street soon after being arrested, and they turn the juvenile justice system into a revolving door.

"The kids think it's a joke, and, quite frankly, it is," Ramsey said.

Police said the perfect case for the bill came up at the department's morning crime briefing yesterday. Officials discussed a juvenile who was arrested in January for stealing a car, in March for stealing another car, last month for robbery and last weekend for a more violent robbery. Executive Assistant D.C. Police Chief Michael J. Fitzgerald. Without access to records, "we wouldn't get to know where he is" once he leaves court, Fitzgerald said.

Council member Phil Mendelson (D-At Large), who heads the Judiciary Committee, said the earliest the bill could come up for a vote by the full council would be in the fall.

