

# Concerns on Proposed Youth Block Grant

THE ESSENCE OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTION REQUIRES A LONG-TERM AND CONSISTENT INVESTMENT AND COMMITMENT FROM NEW YORK. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTION HAS PROVEN EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH AND MITIGATING MORE COSTLY RISK BEHAVIORS. CLEARLY, NEW YORK'S YOUTH BUREAU STRUCTURE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTION SERVICES IS UNIQUE WITHIN THIS COUNTRY.



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**NEW YORK NEEDS ONE YOUTH AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT AGENDA NOT A MYRIAD OF DISCONNECTED PROGRAMS. REINVESTMENT IN VIABLE COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES FOR YOUTH, SUCH AS PREVENTION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES PROVIDED AND COORDINATED BY YOUTH BUREAUS IS ESSENTIAL TO KEEP ALL YOUTH SAFE AND OUT OF HARM'S WAY, INCLUDING OUT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.**

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**POINT 1:** New York State is abandoning its long-time leadership and partnership in youth prevention, intervention and development services as articulated in the Executive Law 420 19A.

- Since the inception of the Youth Bureau system in 1965, New York State has been a national leader in youth development, prevention and intervention services. These services are an effective alternative to juvenile/criminal justice and are a viable support to youth and families throughout the child welfare arena.
- Suddenly, the state seems on the verge of reversing this historic policy and heading in the opposite direction – with a county block grant approach that will be disjointed, with no state oversight, no accountability to youth prevention services and absent of an informed direction and structure that New York State required.
- The effective date of January 1, 2009 could dismantle an entire system which keeps kids in safe environments and out of potentially dangerous situations, including keeping them out of the juvenile justice system.
- State Aid currently provided through Executive Law 420, 19A serves as a core magnet for other local, state, federal and private funding. Therefore, any diminishing commitment or deterioration of the Youth Bureau structure will have a deleterious impact on all leveraged resources well beyond those of this block grant.

**POINT 2:** The proposed paradigm shift might appear to provide cost-saving measures and enhance local control, however, combining mandated, non-secure and secure detention services with prevention pits comprehensive community-based programs against the more costly use of detention programs.

This in no way should minimize the importance of maintaining both systems to appropriately address the diverse needs of youth and families in all communities.

- Proposing mandated secure and non-secure detention services and non-mandated prevention services together in one block grant pits mandated vs. non-mandated programs at a time of local, state and federal economic distress and diminishes the opportunity to create a consistent threshold of financial support for programs that require long-term investment and do make a difference.
- Counties will be forced to choose between mandated detention services and youth prevention services, with less money than ever. Youth Bureaus work collaboratively with their municipalities under the current structure to best determine the needs of all youth in their communities and account for and evaluate the effectiveness of this investment. One child in detention services for over 100 days could potentially “eat up” all funding, thus eliminating youth development and prevention services which in the long term has a greater impact on keeping kids safe, healthy and out of harm’s way.



- For example, to place a juvenile in non-secure detention costs \$270-450/day. A 30 day stay at \$300/day can cost \$9,000 for one child for one month. The same amount of funding can enable 9 youth who are not yet in trouble to get the mentoring they need to build the confidence and skills they need to succeed in school and avoid drugs and crime for one year. The average cost of a youth development program that prepares children and youth for graduation, jobs, and civic responsibilities ranges from a few hundred dollars to approximately -\$1,500/child/year.
- When local officials are forced to choose between providing expensive mandated and effective prevention programs that have been proven to divert youth from courts and foster care, they are often forced to choose to make short-term necessary decisions that have long term negative consequences.



### POINT 3: What happens to youth without services?

- The youth bureau system currently provides youth development, prevention and intervention services to over 2 million youth and their families throughout New York State.
- Services are community-defined and diverse - youth violence and gang prevention, leadership development, community service learning, employment/employability, family intervention, after-school opportunities, life skills education, juvenile justice, runaway/homeless, teen pregnancy/HIV prevention, family mediation, etc.
- Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, an organization of law enforcement officials which advocates for prevention, calls 3-6PM the Prime Time for Crime, when unsupervised youth are most likely to either commit crimes or be victimized.
- With less money, if mandated detention services need to be covered by the funding in the block grant, how do we guarantee that money for services previously funded by the Youth Development and Delinquency Program Prevention, Special Delinquency Prevention Program, and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act will continue to be served? Or any consistent level of support that allows for programs to retain effectiveness?
- What happens to these youth and families as of January 1, 2009 if services become a lesser priority, particularly in tough fiscal times? **This date, at a minimum, needs to be rescinded.**
- When youth development and prevention programs aren't available, youth don't get the skills and supports they need to avoid problems at home, school, and in the community. When you eliminate prevention and intervention services which cost about \$1,000/year/child, the number of children and youth needing expensive crisis services, entering the court system and foster care will escalate, increasing the costs to \$50,000/child/year to be born by local governments and all New Yorkers.

### POINT 4: The flexibility and local decision making argument is illusory. Youth are bound not to get the services they need.

- It is not fiscally prudent for Youth Bureaus to continue to provide services after January 1, 2009 without knowing if they have any funding at all. It is one thing to prepare for less funding, however, non-existence will be irreparable even in the advent of good economic times in the future.
- The cost-effectiveness of providing youth development and prevention services has long been beyond dispute. Think tanks, child advocates and elected officials have coalesced on this to provide a well thought out comprehensive plan to meet the needs of youth across New York State communities.
- Youth Bureaus have been a partner with New York State and work collaboratively with the chief executive of the municipality and the local social services commissioner to best meet the needs of ALL kids in their communities.
- The need to pay for mandated services, such as secure and non-secure detention should not come off the backs of all youth who are currently engaged in prevention services. In fact, a most recent report issued by the Children's Defense Fund indicates, that "the pipeline to prison must be replaced with a pipeline to success for all our children".



### POINT 5: Youth Development, Prevention and Intervention is Essential in Critical Services to Youth

- Research demonstrates that there is a significant reduction in problem behaviors that ranged from alcohol and drug use to high-risk sexual behavior and violence when programs utilized positive youth development skill-building and environmental/organizational change.
- There is evidence that the joining of risk/resiliency and strength-based positive youth development as it applies to juvenile justice has a strong impact on reducing or preventing juvenile crime and/or its reoccurrence.
- Strength-based, wrap around and mentoring programs reflect promising results in terms of reduced residential placement and lowered recidivism.

# Recommendations For a Youth Prevention System And Funding



- 1. Uphold Executive Law 420 Article 19a to maintain the current youth bureau system;**
2. Direct the Juvenile Justice Task Force to look at the current youth development, prevention and intervention system and make recommendations for a youth prevention system which cost-effectively serves the best interest and needs of the 2 million youth receiving services;
- 3. Delay the block grant implementation date of January 1, 2009** until prudent review of the current system and the needs of all youth, including high-risk youth, is examined;
4. Turn around the repeal of the SFY 2008-09 appropriations for YDDP, SDPP and RHYA that would have funded programs during calendar year 2009.
- 5. Focus on Youth Prevention & Development Funding and remove any State mandated services (Secure and Non-secure Detention Service) from any proposed prevention funding stream;**



6. Consolidate additional State youth prevention funding in a Youth Prevention funding stream, which allows for greater leveraging of public and private funding, including federal funds.
- 7. Assure that such funding streams reach youth in all counties and cities, towns and villages in New York State;**
8. Uphold the responsibility of the NYS Office of Children and Families Services (OCFS) for system accountability; approving local plans; guiding cost/benefit methods and calculations; providing technical assistance; providing training and capacity building; developing outcome and performance criteria, evaluating outcome measurement and conducting resource development work;
- 9. Sets aside funding (\$200,000) for youth development, prevention and intervention training and capacity building to include training at the local and statewide level by sharing best practices, enhancing monitoring and evaluation, researching national models, and adhering to positive outcomes.**
10. Reinvest in youth development and prevention services to insure health and safety for all youth in new york state.

