



CSSD Chronicle



A regular publication of information and news about Court Support Services
Division

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"Raise the Age" Initiative has begun Implementation

Until recently, Connecticut has been one of only three states in the country that processes older adolescents as adults in the criminal justice system. Many leaders had pointed out that the state was out of step in its treatment of youth and the current scientific research demonstrating significant cognitive differences between adults and older adolescents. "Incorporating 16/17 year old youth into the juvenile justice system makes sense from a policy perspective," noted William Carbone, CSSD Executive Director. "Studies comparing the recidivism rates of youth in the juvenile system with those handled as adults indicate that youth in the adult system are likely to re offend more quickly and at higher rates." In 2006, a committee was established, the Juvenile Jurisdiction Planning and Implementation Committee (JJPIC) which is now known as the Juvenile Jurisdictional Policy and Operating Coordinating Council (JJPOCC). This body was charged with creating a plan to align the state's policies with mainstream practice and to plan for the implementation of any required changes in the system. As a result of the group's efforts, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation (Public Act 06-187) in 2007 to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 16 and 17 year olds which will be effective as of 1/1/2010. The legislation was the first step in the overall plan to create system changes for older adolescents. *(For further information on the JJPOCC*

<http://www.housedems.ct.gov/jjplic/index.html>

BACKGROUND: The original movement over 100 years ago to create a separate juvenile justice system was based on the idea that youth lacked moral and judgmental maturity and could be considered less culpable than adults. Over time, high rates of violence among youth inspired more "get tough on crime" laws that increasingly brought young people – especially older teenagers – under the jurisdiction of the adult court. Improved understanding of youth development, and greater scientific knowledge about brain functions, has caused lawmakers to reconsider this approach.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the death penalty for anyone younger than 18 and gave three general differences in its reasoning: lack of maturity, heightened susceptibility to external influences and insufficiently developed character. The Court also noted that treating them as adults is inconsistent with their legal status in other areas i.e., by law, in most states, 16/17 year olds cannot vote, purchase or consume alcohol, gamble or marry without written consent, etc.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DEVELOPED BY MANY STAKEHOLDERS: Connecticut State Representative Toni Walker and Senator Toni Harp, who led the legislative effort to have the laws changed, are co chairs of the JJPOCC along with Secretary Robert Genario of the Office of Policy and Management. A wide cross section of stakeholders participate: police chiefs, children's advocates, lawyers, judges and representatives from state agencies, including Department of Children and Families, Department of Correction, Department of Education, Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services as well as numerous Judicial Branch divisions. In addition to successfully passing the new legislation, the Coordinating Council plan also includes implementing improvements to court diversion and pre-trial detention practices; establishment of new court facilities known as Regional Youth Courts; and phase in of an effective system of services and supports for 16- and 17-year-olds. The juvenile detention system is also being overhauled and expanded to anticipate the influx of older adolescents.

IMPACT ON CSSD: The implications for CSSD in raising the age are far-reaching, even *before* the legislative change takes effect in 2010. In total, seventy (70) new Probation Officers will be hired. Twenty new staff started in November, with fifty more slated for fall 2008. Before 2010, these will be Adult Probation Officers with dedicated, reduced caseloads; after that, officers working with youth will become Juvenile Probation Officers. All officers working with 16 & 17 year olds will receive training around supervision practices and interventions targeted at the unique developmental needs of older adolescents and their families.

PROJECTED OUTCOMES: Over time, projected outcomes include lower rearrest rates, fewer youth incarcerated, placed or hospitalized, reduced use of illicit substances, reduced minority representation, more youth completing school, increased engagement in pro social activities, better family functioning, and improved community safety. "This is a complete change from what we have traditionally done and a paradigm shift from what we have thought about youth and crime," noted Executive Director Carbone. "The impact of science and best practice research is being felt in all areas of the criminal justice system. CSSD is using this new knowledge to improve the quality of services that we provide for older adolescents. Intervening with this age group can have a profound effect on their futures and public safety in general."

NEW PROGRAMMING, EXPANDED SERVICES: A comprehensive continuum of services is being planned with attention to eliminating gaps that should reduce triggers to recidivism for these youth. Great care will be taken to ensure that all interventions are developmentally appropriate and based on individual risk/needs for the targeted population. Researched based, effective practices such as strength based, family inclusive, trauma sensitive, community based, culturally competent & gender responsive, will be mandatory elements of the programming. Existing juvenile contracts are being expanded to serve older adolescent youth and additional new programs will be created as well. Some contracts were expanded in October 2007 and others are slated for changes in April 2008. It is anticipated that new programming will be implemented beginning in 2009. Ultimately, CSSD will contract for clinical evaluations, substance abuse and mental health treatment programs, cognitive behavioral programs, home- and family-based services, educational / vocational programs, and diversionary services targeted to this population. Case management services will be provided by program staff to help families. Discharge planning will emphasize access to community supports and encouragement of positive activities.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about the 16/17 Initiative, contact CSSS Program Manager Julie Revaz at 860-721-2172 or Julie.revaz@jud.ct.gov.

Suggestions? Questions? Comments? Concerns? Contact us! Rena.Goldwasser@jud.ct.gov