

**OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY
DIVISION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

The importance of focusing attention on youth is being recognized by leaders at the national and state level. In a recent address, Attorney General Janet Reno stated that, "The single most important message to send to anyone who wants to listen is that somehow or other in America we are going to have to place children first again." Governor Florio placed a priority on youth when he established the Cabinet Action Group on Juvenile Justice in 1991. Attorney General Del Tufo, who chairs the Cabinet Action Group, has emphasized the importance of improving the New Jersey juvenile justice system. He has taken the lead in a major reform of the system, moving the Division of Juvenile Services from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Human Services.

In the New Jersey Sentencing Policy Commission Research Literature Overview, Professor John DiIulio of Princeton and the Brookings Institute states, "...after all is said and done, the most serious offenders are those boys who begin their delinquent careers at a very early age." He also points out that, "The criminological research suggests that a justice system that spends most of its resources at the 'back end' is a system that has things exactly backwards. As the spending data available to the Commission reveal, thus it is in New Jersey."

Data gathered by the New Jersey Juvenile Delinquency Commission includes that:

1. There are almost 100,000 arrests of juveniles each year;
2. One in every five arrests is a juvenile arrest;

3. New Jersey ranks sixth nationally in the number of juvenile arrests and fourth in the arrest rate for violent index offenses committed by juveniles;
4. About 11,000 juveniles are admitted to county detention centers annually; the average daily population is over 650;
5. About 200 juveniles are waived to adult court each year;
6. Over 12,000 juveniles are on probation and about 1,300 are under the jurisdiction of the state correctional system;

An Office of Juvenile Justice has been established within the Division of Criminal Justice to carry out the Department of Law and Public Safety's commitment to: (1) prevent delinquency, (2) improve New Jersey's juvenile justice system, and (3) enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement in investigating juvenile crime and prosecuting offenders, especially those chronic juvenile offenders who account for most of the serious and violent crimes. Establishing an Office of Juvenile Justice will ensure that such activities and programs for juveniles are coordinated and given a high priority. The Office will carry out special projects as assigned by the Attorney General and the Director of the Division of Criminal Justice, and coordinate the Department's efforts in all matters related to the juvenile justice function.

Following are examples of the responsibilities of the Office of Juvenile Justice, entailing either direct involvement or functioning in a coordinating role.

1. Represent the Attorney General in interdepartmental efforts directed toward youth and delinquency. The move of Juvenile Services from Corrections to Human Services is a first step to improve New Jersey's juvenile justice system. The

responsibilities of various state executive departments are not clear, nor are the responsibilities of the state and the counties. Juvenile delinquency prevention involves coordination of programs in the community, including the schools, special programs for mental health and for the developmentally disabled, support for families and for abused and neglected children. For juveniles who commit delinquent acts, there is involvement of police, prosecutors and the courts. Although New Jersey's juvenile code lists 18 dispositions, few of these programs actually exist.

2. Establish ongoing communication with law enforcement groups (Prosecutors Association, Chiefs Association, Juvenile Officers Association) to identify necessary legislation or Attorney General policy action relative to juvenile justice issues.

3. Cooperate with existing Division of Criminal Justice efforts to assist county prosecutors and local police in the handling of juvenile matters. This includes monitoring the use of the model juvenile standards and policy made available to police departments through the Division of Criminal Justice/Chiefs Association standards program. The new office will also recommend curriculum and content for basic and in-service juvenile justice training programs for police officers, investigators and assistant prosecutors.

4. Cooperate with programs of the Office of Bias Crime and Community Relations, a number of which are directed toward juveniles and those involved in the juvenile justice system.

5. Review the Code of Juvenile Justice and recommend any revisions as needed.

6. Review and monitor all litigation concerning the interpretation or construction of the Code of Juvenile Justice or any other statutes affecting the handling of juvenile matters.

7. Review all legislative proposals which would affect the juvenile justice system and solicit comments from law enforcement groups regarding those proposals.

8. Monitor appellate decisions as they relate specifically to the investigation and prosecution process in juvenile cases.

9. Advise law enforcement agencies of any changes to the law which would impact their handling of cases involving juveniles.

10. Monitor the disposition of serious juvenile offender cases, including waiver cases, as a fundamental part of any statewide policy in this area.

11. Coordinate the Department's response to funding initiatives primarily for youth such as the annual department input into the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Plan, the new federal Community Services Program, existing and new federal and state job programs. Work with the Department Grants Coordinator to maximize resources from federal and other sources.

12. Immediate objectives of the Office of Juvenile Justice will include:

A. Coordinate Department efforts to develop and implement a Youth Gang Initiative. This initiative is intended to take immediate steps to control youth gangs and their criminal activity through concerted law enforcement and community action.

B. Develop plans to convene a think tank type meeting early in 1994 to explore the state of juvenile justice in New Jersey and increase the visibility of and

interest in the issue. The meeting could involve the Governor, selected legislators, cabinet members, faculty from Princeton and Rutgers School of Criminal Justice and practitioners. Subjects could include progress of the move of Juvenile Services to Human Services, national trends and suggestions for specific improvements in our policies and practices.

ORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE

The Office of Juvenile Justice will be in the Division of Criminal Justice. The Office will initially be staffed by a Chief with extensive experience in the juvenile justice or juvenile services field. An additional professional level staff member will also be assigned as quickly as possible following a recommendation from the chief as to the qualifications, experience and skills most appropriate for the position. The existing Division of Criminal Justice Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention staff will also be merged into the new Office of Juvenile Justice consistent with the objectives of this office.