

Nov 18 2009 FJJA testimony to the Senate Criminal Justice Committee- Cathy Craig-Myers

My name is Cathy Craig-Myers and I am with the Florida Juvenile Justice Association.

As you have heard, the Collins Center convened a justice summit this week in Tampa to look at criminal justice and juvenile justice systems. Three messages were very clear:

- **Number One** - We have a huge prison system, with enormous rising costs. Conventional wisdom tells us that we will need to keep building more prisons if things don't change.
- **Number Two** - In order to stop growing the prison system we need to look at funding effective alternatives that reduce crime and lower recidivism rates.
- **Number Three** - Perhaps now is the right time to rethink our policy on public safety. Instead of getting "tougher" on crime, we should be getting "smarter" on crime.

So the question becomes -- what are the implications for juvenile justice?

Members of the Florida Juvenile Justice Association believe that Juvenile Justice is a critical component of our public safety policy.

Our members represent every part of the continuum including juvenile assessment centers, prevention, intervention and diversion programs, residential treatment, gender specific services, education and reentry programs. We fully support a balanced continuum of care. In fact, you will hear from nine FJJA member agencies today who serve kids across the continuum of care.

Our members know that our successes (and our failures) will be a predictor of how many prison beds we will need to build in the future. Our members know we have the power to slow that down.

Our members know that many prisoners pass through the juvenile justice system on their way to adult prison. Yesterday, the Collins Center put that number possibly as high as 50%.

Our members believe that in order to keep kids from penetrating into the adult system we must consider the juvenile justice continuum as a "prevention program" to the Department of Corrections.

Our members know that if we are successful in our efforts we can truly impact public safety by preventing "future crimes" by "future criminals."

Our members know that the primary goal should always be to catch kids early before they enter the system, and hope we will see an increased focus on frontend services and we also know that the right service for the right youth at the right time will help to reclaim kid's futures, recoup taxpayer dollars, and restore communities.

Our members applaud the legislature for keeping the dialogue going about the importance of a balanced, effective and accountable juvenile justice continuum.

And finally, *our members* know that you face very, very tough decisions in the upcoming session. We ask that you look at the juvenile justice system for what it often becomes a front door into adult corrections.

Effective juvenile justice programs can help to close that door. Thank you.