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## **Juvenile Justice Stakeholders Lay Out 5-Point Plan (in response to Blueprint Report to be released today)**

Advocates and stakeholders represented collectively by Children's Campaign, Inc., Florida Juvenile Justice Association, and Florida Network of Youth & Family Services - three groups which envisioned and supported the creation of the Juvenile Justice Blueprint Commission - commend the work of that body and the report released today. The findings chart a balanced approach that will protect the public safety while turning around the lives of troubled youth.

Governor Charlie Crist, Lt. Governor Jeff Kottcamp, and former Department of Juvenile Justice Secretary Walt McNeil have shown exceptional leadership in forming the Blueprint Commission and bringing the discussion about Florida's juvenile justice system into the open. This frank and inclusive process was long overdue. Commission Chairman Frank Brogan adeptly facilitated a fair and level public discourse where all sides were heard.

Attention now shifts to implementing the recommendations contained in the blueprint report. For that to become a reality, execution lies with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Secretary McNeil laid the foundation for a true partnership between government and the wide range of stakeholders, advocates and experts. He understood that the private sector provides 85% of the services to the youth and their families and are responsible for the results achieved for each child. Inviting them to the table promoted a unified vision. Continuous engagement of and partnership with the stakeholders, advocates and experts in rolling out proven strategies will be essential for the Blueprint Commission's work to impact the lives of children.

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A five point plan of action requires immediate attention and subsequent action:

- Consistency of Leadership – The new DJJ Secretary must be committed fully to visionary reform. Programmatic, budgetary, and policy decisions made by the DJJ executive team, as well as the daily treatment that youth receive in the juvenile justice system, must reflect this commitment to transparency, accountability and best practices and to the partnerships essential to effecting change.
- A Strong Independent Department of Juvenile Justice – Rumblings continue in some circles that the DJJ be joined to adult corrections as one agency. This will kill the opportunity for any reform of a system that is already challenged by over criminalizing the actions of many young people. This is a failed policy and executive and legislative branch leaders should publicly reject it once and for all. Children are not little adults. Children can and should be treated differently by a department geared to serving their unique needs if the goal is to divert them from a long experience in the criminal justice system and away from exposure to hardened criminals.
- Equity in Public Safety Appropriations - Public safety starts with the juvenile justice system. Troubled children when ignored or unserved too often grow into criminal adults. But DJJ is chronically underfunded in Florida while the budget of adult corrections grows.

The Governor's budget office got several priorities straight concerning children in this year's budget released last week. This was not one of them. In the budget as proposed, DJJ would absorb nearly a \$20-million cut while corrections would receive an increase of \$344-million. It does not serve public safety to stand on the sidelines and wait for troubled children to become older so that the corrections system can deal with them. This appropriations policy does not prevent crime and does not prevent crime victims.

- On-going Oversight by the Blueprint Commission – It is crucial that the blueprint report not be shelved, like so many reports in Florida over the years. Reconvening the Blueprint Commission annually for the next three years and affording them oversight responsibility would go a long way to ensuring that the reform effort is executed.
- Comprehensive Legislation – Chairmen with oversight authority of Florida's juvenile justice system in the Florida Senate and Florida House should immediately bring forward sweeping legislation addressing fixes to the system as recommended by the Blueprint Commission. Most recommendations of the commission embrace testimony heard previously by the legislative committees and in discussions among its members. Many recommendations do not require additional appropriations; in fact, many fixes are to be found in improving and streamlining daily operations and managing the flow of children to the services they need.