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Berks County Juvenile Probation Office

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PUBLIC TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL #24

Submitted by Bruce A. Grim
January 31, 1991 before the Judiciary Committee
House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Why do I urge your favorable consideration of House Bill 24? Because adequate funding for Juvenile Probation Officers impacts directly on the day-to-day operation of these departments and helps to determine not only what we do, but also how well we do it.

The job description of a Juvenile Probation Officer can be divided into two generalized areas: 1) required paper work and procedural responsibilities, and 2) supervision and social service intervention. As caseload size increases, the paper chase demands a higher percent of the work day. Supervision and direct client contact decreases, and the ability of a Juvenile Probation Officer to be an effective deterrent to future crime diminishes.

I am here today to tell you about some recent developments in Berks County that stimulated changes within our local juvenile justice system, some of which could happen state-wide if additional funding were pumped into the system.

During the spring and summer of 1989 the County Commissioners had a number of meetings with out Juvenile Court to discuss, among other topics, the implementation of a service delivery system for truants. In October, 1989, the Juvenile Probation Office began providing services to truants. Eventually, the number of newly referred cases swelled to over 200 truanting youth. This influx of new cases threatened to overwhelm staff unless changes were made.

What we did

The Court and Juvenile Probation Office approached the Commissioners and requested the creation of six additional Juvenile Probation Office positions, including one supervisory/administrative, three intensive supervision, and two general supervision officers. The Commissioners recognized the need for the positions but had no money available for such funding. Eventually, six positions were created, but with the understanding that the Juvenile Court and Juvenile Probation Office would make every attempt to reduce institutional spending on commitment costs for adjudicated youth by at least the cost of the new positions.

Money was transferred from the department's placement budget to the personnel budget, existing Juvenile Probation Office staff were promoted into the advanced positions, and new employees were hired in June and July, 1990. Effective in June, the Court aggressively began releasing youth after shorter than normal lengths of commitment, avoided placement entirely by placing "marginal" youth on intensive probation, began using more short-term wilderness placements, and more frequently used deferred or suspended commitments to facilities. The following figures reflect our changed patterns:

JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICE SUPERVISED YOUTH IN PLACEMENT

<u>Date</u>	<u>Delinquents</u>	<u>Dependents</u>	<u>Total</u>
May 15, 1990	104	10	114
June 18, 1990	92	9	101
July 10, 1990	87	9	96
August 14, 1990	77	9	86
September 10, 1990	60	5	65
October 9, 1990	66	5	71
November 13, 1990	69	6	75
December 17, 1990	67	4	71

The following demonstrates reduced placement costs for delinquents in the private sector:

<u>Month Ending</u>	<u>Monthly Expenditures</u>
6/30/90	\$193,779
7/31/90	168,794
8/31/90	154,300
9/30/90	144,387
10/31/90	115,741
11/30/90	97,304

The point of all this is not to represent Berks County as having a model system, but merely to demonstrate what can happen and actually did happen in a County that is given additional funding for badly needed staff. In our case we were fortunate that our Commissioners were willing to take a chance and that the court was able to produce impressive results almost immediately.

This type of reduced placement initiative is premised upon having adequately trained and available staff. Otherwise such a plan would unduly risk public safety. With placement costs ranging from \$60 to \$140/day, and in our case averaging around \$90/day, not only the counties, but also the Commonwealth could recognize appreciable savings in placement costs by passing HB24.

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The savings to the Commonwealth would occur because the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare currently reimburses delinquency (and dependency) placement costs incurred by the counties at various rates from 50% to 75%. Aside from fiscal savings, reduced placement on a broad based approach would reduce pressure on the system to create new placement facilities and/or expand existing ones.

I appreciate your thoughtful attention to my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce A. Grim

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