

Testimony before the House Committee on the Judiciary
Regarding House Bill No.24
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As Director of Court Services and Chief Juvenile Probation Officer of the Allegheny County Juvenile Court, I would like to testify on behalf of House Bill No. 24.

Allegheny County presently receives grant-in-aid from the Commonwealth through the Juvenile Court Judges Commission to subsidize juvenile probation officer personnel costs for traditional probation services and specialized probation programs. Grant money is also received for on going training of court probation staff.

In 1990, the Juvenile Court Judges Commission grant received by the County subsidized approximately 12% of the actual personnel costs. As personnel expenses continue to increase, a continuing percentage decline is expected if no grant-in-aid adjustment is made to increase the revenue received for juvenile probation services.

Two weeks ago the County Board of Commissioners launched the first phase of Allegheny County 2001 which is a comprehensive planning process designed to help the County prepare for life in the 21st Century. The planning process involves professional and community leaders serving on resource panels charged with the responsibility of developing a vision of the County's future. The process involves an examination of past and current trends and the development of a future strategy. Juvenile Justice issues are an integral part of this planning.

An examination of the juvenile justice system in Allegheny

County indicates that there has been a significant 20% increase in delinquency referrals over the past six years. Even more dramatic was a 33% increase in serious offenses from 1988 to 1989. Serious offenses used as a bench mark were aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, sex offenses, auto theft, and arson. As of today, there are approximately 500 more youth on probation than the same date two years ago. There was also a dramatic rise in referrals for "crack " sales over the past two years. I am sure similar statistics can be cited by juvenile probation departments throughout the state.

In order to deal with the presenting rise in delinquency and serious offenses, the court has been able to design and operate programs which impact the problem. For example, in Allegheny County, Juvenile Court operates a Special Services Program for Adjudicated Sex Offenders, a Drug and Alcohol Assessment Unit for juvenile offenders who abuse or are dependent upon chemicals, a High Impact Probation Program which provides intensive supervision for youth who need more counseling and supervision than can be provided through traditional probation services, an Aftercare Program for youth exiting institutional placement, a Home Detention Program which utilizes electronic monitoring and diverts youth from secure detention, and a Victim's Services Department which provides support for victims of juvenile crime. In 1990, the probation department initiated an innovative program called the Community Intensive Supervision Project. This project provides intensive supervision, counseling, and drug testing for one hundred juvenile offenders in targeted communities. These youth but for the existence of this program should be institutional-

ized. This program operates seven days a week from 4 to Midnight. The project is staffed by community monitors who actually live in the neighborhoods where the program is located so that maximum supervision, counseling and role modeling can be provided.

All of the above mentioned probation programs were accomplished through direct county funding subsidized through grants received from the Juvenile Court Judges Commission. The grants enable the court to initiate the programs but as stated only provide for a small percent of the actual costs. Also, since court operated programs, distinct from Children and Youth Services are not eligible for Act 148 reimbursement except for placements, the major portion of the costs must be borne by the County.

From what I have described, it is evident the County has demonstrated a willingness to support probation services. To continue to do so, however, there must be an increase in the level of subsidy. Subsidizing a higher percentage of probation staff personnel costs (80%) as provided by House Bill 24 would go far in accomplishing this task. If this is not done the vision of what the juvenile justice system in Allegheny County will look like in the next decade and 2001 is bleak.

Though I have cited statistics and programs within Allegheny County, I am sure that it applies to all probation departments and counties throughout the Commonwealth. In fact the lack of higher subsidized personnel costs may hurt some counties more than mine. Most counties could and would develop programs to effectively treat and supervise juvenile offenders if an increase in revenue is granted for personnel costs. Qualified, dedicated,

professional probation staff is the key to any effort to operate an effective court system. In order to keep and attract the necessary people for an effective probation department, the counties will need eighty (80%) percent of personnel costs subsidized through the principal grant provided through the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission.

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