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TESTIMONY PRESENTED

TO

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY COMMITTEE

IN SUPPORT OF

HOUSE BILL NO. 24

BY

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DIRECTOR OF HUMAN SERVICES

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

JANUARY 31, 1991

Good Morning, my name is Mike Breslin and I am the Director of Human Services in Northumberland County. I appreciate the opportunity to express my support for House Bill 24.

My responsibilities include administrative oversight for Children and Youth Services, Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Drug and Alcohol, Adult Services, and Juvenile Probation. This provides me with a unique perspective on the issues relating to this proposed legislation.

The current level of funding support from the Commonwealth for Juvenile Probation is completely inadequate. In many counties, the current grant-in-aid represents less than fifteen percent (15%) of the personnel salary costs. This compares with funding levels which range from seventy-five percent (75%) to one hundred percent (100%) of total operating costs in other social service programs operated by the counties. This funding inequity creates several issues and concerns.

Obviously, the major burden for funding Juvenile Probation Services falls on county government. Due to varying resources and perspectives, the level of service in the Juvenile Probation System will vary greatly from county to county. You have heard this morning about some of the most effective programs and services provided in some counties. These services are not consistently available in

all counties of the Commonwealth. Therefore, what may happen to a delinquent youngster is very much a factor of where he lives. This inequity is not acceptable.

In addition, the inadequate funding for Juvenile Probation Services creates a reverse incentive for counties. Funding is available to counties through the Act 148 funding stream for the most restrictive and costly of services available for delinquent youth.

This reverse incentive frequently results in youth being placed in residential or restrictive services due to the lack of adequate prevention, diversion, and probation services in a county. This reverse incentive creates another dilemma for those counties that commit county dollars to the probation services. In counties where a strong probation system exists, placements in expensive residential services are frequently reduced. However, the resulting savings in dollars are actually derived by the Children and Youth System rather than the probation system which took the initiative to prevent those placements. The result is that the further enhancement of prevention and diversion is stymied.

Clearly, the Juvenile Probation System becomes the stepchild of the other county social service systems. This diminishes the ability of the Juvenile Probation System to participate with other agencies as a full partner in any efforts to coordinate the social service system in counties.

The ultimate outcome of the current funding structure is an inability for the Juvenile Probation System to provide adequate intervention and community based services for delinquent youth. By enhancing this capability and the ability of probation to serve delinquent youth, there will certainly be a more effective response to delinquent youth and an ultimate reduction in costly residential placement costs in the other county human service programs.

My experience has convinced me that the Juvenile Probation System is an important and integral part of the continuum of services in our counties. Their expertise and competency is invaluable in serving and reaching many of our at-risk youth. The Juvenile Probation System has the capacity to develop and operate many important community-based services for this population, unfortunately, resources for this have not been consistently available. Many counties are driven to securing demonstration funding for programs through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, only to have those services "die on the vine" because there is no continuation funding available to support those programs in the Juvenile Probation System. This proposed legislation will resolve this dilemma facing counties.

Another important aspect of the proposed legislation includes the funding to the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission to provide for training, graduate education, development of

innovative juvenile justice programs, and research on juvenile justice issues. The professionalism that I see across this state in the Juvenile Justice System is a clear result of these programs and services operated by the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission. It is imperative they be included as part of this legislation.

The Juvenile Justice Training Program, operated by the Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research, reached over 3,100 juvenile justice professionals in 1990. The Graduate Education Program for Juvenile Probation Officers is recognized as a nation-wide model. Both of these initiatives have had dramatic impact on enhancing the level of professionalism within the Juvenile Justice System. The level of competency among probation staff has resulted in a significant reduction in turnover as compared to other county social service programs. The statistical analysis and research initiatives provide an important ability for the Commonwealth to be continually assessing the needs of the Juvenile Justice System and the effectiveness of various interventions. These initiatives have clearly put Pennsylvania on the cutting edge of what is occurring in the Juvenile Justice System in this country.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my support for House Bill 24. I hope that the Legislature will recognize the importance of this legislation in resolving one of the

most glaring systemic inadequacies in the system of services for children and youth in our Commonwealth. I believe that the opportunity that this legislation presents to resolve these problems and to build upon the many successful efforts you have heard about this morning and the recognition Pennsylvania has received at the national level will be well worth the investment called for in this legislation.