

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
JUVENILE  
Charles E. Marker, Judge

Westmoreland County



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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Lawrence Mason, I am Director of the Westmoreland County Juvenile Services Center. In this capacity I serve as Chief of Juvenile Probation as well as the Administrator of our Regional Detention Center.

I am now in my twenty-seventh year of working in the Juvenile Justice System. I have spent fourteen years involved in the Mental Health System and many years doing various volunteer work with children.

My twenty-seven years of experience along with my formal education has convinced me that although there is no simple solution to the problem of Juvenile Delinquency. The approach to the solution is a simple one that is working with children one to one to build a relationship based on trust and respect. Such programs as Intensive Probation and Aftercare do just this.

I thank you and the members of your committee for this opportunity to share a few thoughts about the dilemma we in Juvenile Probation find ourselves in and why Juvenile Probation funding should be increased. I will be brief and not take up your time quoting statistics regarding the success and cost effectiveness of Intensive and Aftercare programs that we should be funding in Pennsylvania to reduce the total cost of serving delinquent as well as dependent children.

Much information and statistics regarding the success of these programs is available from the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, The National Center for Juvenile Justice, The National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

I would like to share with you Westmoreland Counties results of several years of operating Juvenile Court Judges' Commission funded Intensive and Aftercare programs as well as our Penn Free funded Drug and Alcohol program. The Probation Officers assigned to these programs have by far the lowest recidivism rate of all our Probation Officers. I also believe that our Intensive and Aftercare programs are in part responsible for 18.54% drop in dispositions from 1989 to 1990 and a 40.35% decrease in placements for the same period of time. The fact is that although Westmoreland County ranks 8th in Juvenile population, ages 10 to 17 years, we rank 51st in Juvenile Court dispositions. This low ranking in dispositions is also due in part to a large number of cases that are directed after arrest to our volunteer Youth Commission Program.

One might ask, if such programs are so successful why are they not expanded?

Almost all of the entire cost of Intensive and Aftercare programs are salaries and would require added positions. When I have requested our Salary Board to create a new position, they inevitably ask if there are State and Federal funds available to fund the positions. Of course, the answer has been no and my requests are denied. When I explain the cost savings involved by reducing placement costs through such programs, the reply is that the State and Federal government pays up to 90% of placement costs and should therefore be willing to pay a share to reduce these costs. In addition, when making requests to our Salary Board, I find myself in competition with other Human Service Agencies who receive up to 100% funding for positions.

Last year at this time I was encouraged that House Bill No.24 purposed 80% funding of personal salary cost incurred by a county to administer Juvenile Probation services. The Legislative Budget passed contained 7.4 million for Juvenile Probation, up from 2.0 million. Both would have encouraged or required Intensive and Aftercare Programs.

Today I sit here discouraged and faced with the possible loss of our Intensive and Aftercare Programs due to the loss at this time of all State funding for Juvenile Probation Services (Governor's Budget Reserve).

In all my twenty-seven years in Juvenile Probation, I am only aware of funding requests by Juvenile Probation to improve services in cost effective ways. The response for the most part has been years of no increase in funding and now No Funding At All.

If this funding is not forth coming, I am sure the results will be increased placements into the already overcrowded Y.D.C. system and as Delinquents take more and more of the 148 Child-Welfare Budget there will be less funds available for Dependent and Neglected children.

would ask you as a committee and as individuals to do what ever you can not only to restore Juvenile Probation funding but to work for Legislation such as House Bill No. 24 of 1991.

Thank you for this opportunity to have presented my view point regarding this matter.