

Juvenile Justice System Reform in Luzerne County

August 2009

On August 27th, the Advocacy Alliance held the first in a series of three Informational Forums for young people and their families who were traumatized by the Juvenile Justice System Scandal in Luzerne County. The purpose of the Forums is to gather information about the effects of this trauma and insight regarding reform of the Juvenile Justice System across Pennsylvania. Below are the recommendations from the first Forum. At the end of the series of Informational Forums, a report will be crafted and provided to the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission, which will adopt permanent measures to reform the Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System.

What ideal characteristics (procedures, practices, policies, etc.), if attained, could make the greatest difference to the future of the juvenile justice system in Luzerne County?

- The juvenile justice system would explore every option to deal with offenders before separating them from their families
- Once an offender has served his/her sentence, there should not be any probation period
- Communication throughout the juvenile justice system (prior to sentencing, while in placement, etc.) process should be maintained with parents/guardians
- There should not be any psychiatric medications for individuals under 18 years of age without parental notification and input
- There would be more attorneys familiar with the juvenile justice system process in order to serve their clients effectively without bias
- There would be advocates for families throughout the juvenile justice system process to assist parents to ensure all options are explored in a fair and supportive atmosphere
- A multidisciplinary team should be required throughout the juvenile justice system process so that common ground could be reached in the best interest of the offender and their families
- Families would have privacy while in court to allow for an open exchange of circumstances surrounding the issues at hand without fear of rumors spreading about the family or the child
- Parents would be part of their child's evaluation and involved in any dialogue regarding decisions about their child's future
- The juvenile justice system must be supportive of parents during these trying times to help the child "turn the corner" to live a productive life; not make the parents and child feel that the system is against them from the start
- The juvenile justice system would place a priority on the need for parents to be heard and offer a multitude of opportunities for parents to speak
- The juvenile justice system would have sentencing guidelines in relation to offenses
- The juvenile justice system would emphasize helping the child ultimately
- The juvenile justice system would have respectful probation officers who would work collaboratively with families
- Probation officers would be trained in the juvenile justice system process periodically

the Advocacy Alliance

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