

Ohio Juvenile Justice System: Perspectives from the Field



Summary of Stakeholder's Priorities

OVERVIEW

Across the country, states are scrutinizing their responses to juveniles who commit crimes with the recognition that a “tough on crime” approach during the past two decades has not increased public safety, but instead led to expensive and ineffective alternatives for youth and devastating effects for communities. Ohio is one state that is closely examining its juvenile justice system. Government entities, public policy agencies, and social justice organizations are working collaboratively to help support and guide reform in Ohio.¹ The Children’s Law Center, Inc. (CLC) is partnering in that endeavor. One of the driving forces behind the call for juvenile justice reform in Ohio is a recent federal class-action settlement.² The settlement provides the launching pad and momentum to implement systemic changes that are intended to: contribute to better outcomes for youth, invest in proven programming, decrease recidivism, enhance public safety and reduce costs to Ohio taxpayers. Many of the reforms are focused on protecting the constitutional rights of youth placed in the legal custody of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) and on youth reintegrating into the community after incarceration. However, there are also considerable opportunities in stemming delinquency through prevention and in creating tailored comprehensive community-based responses to youth when juvenile justice system involvement is required.

*Let's not forget that we
deal with children, so we
cannot expect adult
responses from them no
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or approaches we take.*

~ Probation/Diversion

At the onset of this wide scale reform, CLC felt it was imperative to begin a dialogue directly with those working in juvenile justice to learn about their needs, current challenges, and priorities for law and policy reform in the juvenile justice arena. Between February and August 2009, focus groups, interviews, and online surveys were utilized to receive input from the judiciary, law enforcement, parents, youth, attorneys, and probation and diversion officers (collectively referred to as stakeholders).³

More than five hundred stakeholders⁴ participated in an information gathering process responding to questions about all aspects of Ohio’s current juvenile justice system and other issues impacting their work. Although this is only a sampling of juvenile justice stakeholders, the objective was not to undertake a comprehensive research study but instead to encourage discussion among and obtain recommendations from stakeholders and to raise awareness about the reform effort. The questions covered such topics as the effectiveness of existing resources, delinquency-related policies and procedures, needed training and rehabilitative programming, and the impact of reforms to date. Not surprisingly, different stakeholder groups had varying perspectives⁵ but despite these divergent

¹ Some of these organizations include, Voices for Children of Ohio, ACLU of Ohio, Juvenile Justice Coalition, Ohio Public Defender’s Office, the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, and the Ohio Department of Youth Services.

² For more information about *S.H. v. Stickrath* and the ensuing settlement go to <http://www.childrenslawky.org/index/litigation.html> or <http://www.dys.ohio.gov/dnn/SettlementAgreement/tabid/81/Default.aspx>.

³ Surveys and focus group questions were tailored for each stakeholder group. Judges, magistrates, and court administrators participated in judicial focus groups and attorneys surveyed were prosecutors, public defenders, private attorneys taking delinquency cases, and court-appointed attorneys, including guardians *ad litem*.

⁴ Probation and diversion officers made up the largest group of respondents and parents and youth the smallest. See the chart at the end of this report for more information about the stakeholder groups and some corresponding demographic information about each constituency.

⁵ For example, law enforcement officers were focused on the public safety aspect of the juvenile justice system, probation officers on

orientations, many participants echoed similar sentiments when it came to identifying needs and priorities. This document summarizes the information collected and highlights the themes that emerged about juvenile justice in Ohio.⁶

OVERARCHING THEMES

- The differences between youth and adults must be recognized in both the law and the development of rehabilitative programs.
- Stakeholders want to be involved in discussions about potential reforms in Ohio with greater collaboration and communication being promoted among juvenile justice professionals.
- The lack of sufficient funding has severely impacted all aspects of the juvenile justice system leading to staff reductions, program closures, and a widespread loss of services and resources.
- Mental health issues are prevalent in youth who enter the juvenile justice system, requiring substantially more understanding and support for mentally-ill youth before, during, and post-system involvement.
- More and earlier prevention efforts must be established at the community-level to diminish delinquent behavior in youth or thwart ongoing delinquent behavior.
- Meaningful, culturally-relevant, and accessible services must be available to youth and families without requiring system involvement to access them.
- Increased public awareness about the goals and function of the juvenile justice system is needed to help communities and the legislature fully appreciate resulting change that can occur at both the individual and community levels.
- Zero tolerance school policies have failed by including within their reach many youth who do not present a danger to school safety, and as a result are overloading the juvenile justice system and unnecessarily leaving many vulnerable children without basic education and life skills.
- There is tremendous need for additional alternatives in the juvenile justice system, particularly for comprehensive, community-based programming for low to moderate risk youth.
- Dispositions should be designed to match the risk, severity of crime, particular circumstances and individualized needs of each youth.
- Repeat offenders pose a significant burden on the system and cause frustration.
- Effectively engaging families is critical for rehabilitation and one of the largest struggles for stakeholders.
- Continued education on best practices and emerging reform issues is essential for juvenile justice professionals.
- Before reforms are implemented, the plan for reforms and their philosophical underpinnings should be transparent and shared with stakeholders.
- Legal issues regarding sex offenses and competency must be addressed.
- Youth must be placed in or closer to their own communities when sent to state institutions

youth services and programming, attorneys on legal aspects of delinquency cases, and parents on the community and helping their children.

⁶For purposes of this report, a theme was indicated when a majority of individuals from one or several constituencies expressed similar sentiments. It does not mean that all individuals who participated in the information gathering process made the same statement. To protect the privacy of stakeholders, identifiable and individual responses are not being shared. The text boxes that appear throughout the document are exact quotes taken from responses but only identify the constituency.

- or out-of-home treatment programs.
- An expansion of programming in every area is needed for youth in the state’s legal custody and comprehensive reentry services and support systems must be established.

PRIORITIES

Funding

Funding for juvenile justice was identified as the foremost needed resource in Ohio. This shortage has profoundly affected every aspect of the juvenile justice system. Without sufficient funding, youth

We need more of everything. Once a program is developed [we] fill it up and there is a waiting list.

~Judge

and families cannot receive the critical and comprehensive support necessary to effect positive change in their lives. Stakeholders discussed the closing of successful programs, the inability to meet mandates, and the shortage of vital community services - all tied to the economic downturn. More specifically, law enforcement and probation/diversion officers relayed that there has been a reduction in staffing leading to stress and less efficient responses; judges talked about the loss of local public defenders offices; and concern over the fact that effective local programs like diversion, mediation, mentoring, restitution, community services, and intensive probation were dismantled.

Mindful of the current economy, stakeholders were reluctant to create a litany of desired resources but conveyed hope that money will be available soon to sustain and develop programs that promote positive outcomes for youth. Many stakeholders suggested that local jurisdictions have more control over juvenile justice-related budgets, which would allow counties to determine which resources would most benefit their community. The concern remains that any reform will lead to unfunded mandates.⁷

Budget cuts have taken a toll on our programs and staff. When something is really working and you can no longer provide that program, the youth are the ones who really miss out.

~Probation/Diversion

Programming, Placement and Alternatives for Youth

A considerable amount of input was collected on the subjects of placement and treatment options for youth. Stakeholders agreed that the juvenile justice system is most effective when there is a balance between rehabilitation and accountability, and that a multitude of programming and placement options should be developed. Stakeholders, however, had different viewpoints about how to approach rehabilitation, especially in regard to placement. With the exception of law enforcement who had a less cohesive position on this issue, most stakeholders believed appropriate, comprehensive risk assessments are an effective tool for assisting with dispositions and placement.⁸ Judges, prosecutors, children's attorneys, families, and probation/diversion officers want *more*

⁷ For example, there was immense support for community-based treatment facilities but also concern that the shift from deinstitutionalization to regionalization and how it would be fiscally supported. Stakeholders also were eager to see this type of shift will alter the RECLAIM formula.

⁸ Many jurisdictions liked their own system for assessing risk which varied from county to county.

programs and alternatives to ODYS commitment for youth of all risk types, but especially for moderate and low risk youth. Judges saw ODYS as a last resort placement alternative. Prosecutors indicated that

We need out-patient options for youth with all types of behavioral issues so that more low risk youth are successful [and] not reentering the system and more moderate risk youth can be maintained in the community.

-Prosecutor

they wanted more dispositional options and shared that in their role it is difficult to balance rehabilitation, public safety, and victim's rights. Law enforcement communicated frustration about the length of time it took to render dispositions, the lack of local detention space, and the need for faster and more severe consequences, especially for repeat offenders. Yet, even the majority of law enforcement indicated that they agreed that more community-based alternatives for youth were necessary. Despite these differences among stakeholders, there were also the following commonalities:

- There was tremendous interest and acceptance of adolescent brain development research. Stakeholders believed that the juvenile justice system must provide placement and treatment options that account for differences between youth and adults and are developmentally appropriate.
- Dispositions should account for the individual factors in a given case and unique needs and circumstances of each youth.
- Programs and services must be available to families without system involvement and ideally at modest to no cost.⁹
- Programming for low and moderate risk youth should be comprehensive, community-based, and include substantial family involvement.
- Youth returning to the community after a commitment in ODYS, should receive intensive reentry services, including case management.
- For youth requiring out-of-home treatment or ODYS commitment, every attempt should be made to place that youth in an institution or program within his/her community.

Very often, the services are not tailored to the needs of the child or the child doesn't have the resources to complete the programs.

~ Children's Attorney

Stakeholders emphasized that programs that may work well in one county or region may not work in another and that effective programs are not available to all youth who could benefit from such programming. The following are issues also discussed by stakeholders that pertain to programming, placement, and alternatives for youth:

⁹ Stakeholders conveyed numerous stories about youth coming to the attention of the juvenile justice system because the parents initiated contact with law enforcement or the courts as a way to seek help for their children. Parents shared that they were told by service providers that their children cannot receive services unless they had been arrested and court-ordered.

Continuum of Care

Stakeholders advocated for wraparound services for youth and their families. Families are typically struggling with a myriad of issues that require attention in and out of formal systems. The continuum of care model appealed to all stakeholder groups. Stakeholders recommended having a person designated, like a case manager, who would follow the youth throughout his/her system involvement. This person could be the point of contact for both the family and court and ensure youth are connected with and receive necessary services to facilitate successful outcomes. The availability of intensive case planning and wraparound services was emphasized as critical at both the front and back end of the system without court involvement.

There must be expanded services for mental health, drug and alcohol, and sexual offender treatment.

~ Prosecutor

Mental Health & Other Specialized Programming

Stakeholders touted specialized programming for mental health, substance abuse, and sex offenses and expressed concern that many of these problems are treated in isolation of other presenting issues. While more specialized treatment in all the above areas was requested, mental health services were cited by stakeholders as the second most scarce, yet most needed, resource after funding.

Stakeholders stated that the system faces a significant challenge in identifying and responding to mental illness in youth and existing programs are already struggling to meet the demand for services. Countless stories were shared where youth did not receive proper treatment which ultimately contributed to their unsuccessful completion of a program or even reoffend. For example, having one psychiatrist conducting evaluations for multiple counties, youth languishing in detention or other institutions without receiving a mental health assessment, those being diagnosed with mental illness but not being given proper medication, a revolving door of unqualified providers and programs, and services that are cost prohibitive and/or short-term only.

Mental health issues abound and the system does not know how to adequately respond.

~Parent

Stakeholders insisted that mental health should be a top priority in Ohio and that services be developed to cover the spectrum of care, including assessment, outpatient, and services delivered within correctional facilities.

Evidence-Based Programming

Judges and probation/diversion officers were the constituencies most acquainted with evidence-based practices¹⁰ and articulated an over-reliance on the terminology. They indicated that they know what programs work in their jurisdictions regardless of whether they can quantify the programs to meet the classification as “evidence-based.” However, stakeholders also understood the importance of being able to demonstrate results, especially when seeking funding. In the end, all stakeholders wanted more programs developed that had proven outcomes.

¹⁰ Those not familiar with evidence-based or evidence-informed services asked for more information about it.

Reentry and Programming within Correctional Facilities

For youth who are placed in the state's custody and sent to ODYS, there was consensus that reentry into the community is a deficient facet of the juvenile justice system. In order to be successful, youth must receive treatment, education, care, and other rehabilitative services while in ODYS; and when

Being able to help other people in here and learning new skills has helped me plan for my future and I know it will help me when I get out.

~ Youth

released, require ongoing support and guidance. Instead, stakeholders described youth who were rendered homeless or denied access to public schools when returning to their communities. Rural counties have few to no formal programs for reentry and use foster care when housing is needed for youth returning to the community. There are numerous youth who have reached the age of majority while in the system and therefore are "dumped" without the ability to access needed services when released. Stakeholders recommended that when youth enter ODYS that they receive treatment that takes

into consideration some of the reasons they were sent to ODYS, that they participate in more skills-based programming, and that transition plans supported by intensive case management be created for their reentry.

Currently there is an inconsistent approach to reentry, with much of it dependent upon the available county resources and the individual parole officer. Stakeholders seemed most satisfied with reentry services when a good relationship existed with the ODYS regional parole administrator. Parole officers and ODYS liaison officers were mentioned by judges as the most critical person in communication with ODYS for release and reentry planning.

Youth stated that they want and need more programming while serving their time in ODYS institutions. Being idle can undermine their progress. Hence, when they have completed their treatment goals, programming should continue if their period of incarceration is not over. The youth shared preferences for programs that teach them skills they will be able to use when released, especially vocational. They also appreciated opportunities to advance their education (taking college-level classes), helping in the community (volunteering), participating in peer-to-peer support, and gaining insight into their behavior. Parents wanted more creative services focused on education and rehabilitation and the ability to communicate with someone on staff at ODYS to help monitor their child's progress.

Prevention

Stakeholders agreed that primary prevention is fundamental to deterring delinquent behavior and were saddened by the number of programs recently closed due to budget cuts. Some of these programs included mentoring, school-based counseling, after-school recreational activities, free mental health, substance abuse and holistic community services. Stakeholders also discussed prevention in terms of early intervention programs designed to reduce recidivism.

Training

Stakeholders indicated that the need for training has increased but opportunities have decreased. They cited cost and lack of time due to reduction in staffing as reasons they were unable to attend training. Offering free training with continuing education credits was recommended across the board. All stakeholders wanted the chance to engage in conversations about juvenile justice reforms and receive education that would improve their responses. The training topics of interest to all stakeholder groups:

- Collaborative models among stakeholders.
- Methods for working with youth and families with mental health and substance abuse problems.
- Ways to engage parents effectively.
- The revamped release authority process.

In addition, prosecutors, children's attorneys, and probation/diversion officers rated the following topics as critical training areas:

- Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act.
- Evidence-based treatment options.
- Adolescent brain development.

There were also the following responses pertaining to training:

- Parents, children's attorneys and probation/diversion officers would like to see more training offered to parents of delinquent youth about the juvenile justice system and the importance of parental involvement.
- Prosecutors asked for more training on evidence and trial practice, disproportionate minority contact, and restorative justice.
- Children's attorneys wanted training on mandatory minimums related to gun and gang specifications and the federal class action, *S.H. v. Stickrath*.
- Probation/diversion officers asked for information on officer safety, motivational interviewing, caseload management, and effective programming. As a constituency they requested the most training in all areas of their work.

Family Engagement

Every stakeholder group, including parents, identified family involvement – or lack thereof – as possibly the single most critical indicator of whether rehabilitative efforts would be successful. When discussing family engagement, most stakeholders focused on parents, but there was recognition that the definition of family must be broadened if the community and systems are to intervene successfully and even prevent delinquency. Stakeholders hypothesized that by the time youth are system-involved, parents are often exhausted and overwhelmed. They recounted times where reintegration of the youth after out-of-home placement failed because either the conditions within the home, which contributed to the delinquency remained; or because the parents did not know how to relate to their child since they were not part of the rehabilitation process.

Stakeholders were roughly split as to whether lack of family involvement derives from concrete, external barriers or from the parents simply not caring. Many acknowledged that all barriers are interrelated. The most common external barriers to involvement mentioned were:

- Lack of resources such as transportation, available services, and time to participate (many parents work several jobs and have more than one child).
- Shortage of culturally-relevant services and evening/weekend family programming.
- Cost of treatment and services.

Even though he messed up I need him to know I will always fight for him even if I want him accountable for his actions. I am a parent before everything else, so I will drop my world to fight for him.

~ Parent

Stakeholders were asked what suggestions they had to encourage parent participation since they cited it as such an enormous challenge. While they relayed that they did not have the answer some ideas offered included the use of voluntary programs, conducting family assessments, court ordering involvement, reaching families earlier, and creating a focus on prevention. Parents of youth who are or have been in the custody of ODYS offered these suggestions:

The juvenile justice system should devote a significant amount of resources to the parents of the juvenile offender. Without modifications at home, the moderate and high risk youth will continue to offend.

~ Law Enforcement

- Developing mentoring for parents and more supportive peer-to-peer models.
 - Making services accessible prior to system involvement.
 - Creating ways for family members to have meaningful input into the care and treatment of youth at every point in the system.
 - Enhancing communication among treatment providers, institutions and families.
 - Offering more opportunities for family involvement (even younger siblings), like family days, for those youth placed at ODYS.
 - Keeping children close to their families when out-of-home placement is ordered.
- Developing mechanisms through which parents can easily learn about the juvenile justice system.

Although stakeholders did not have a solution, they emphasized the vital need for community-based comprehensive programming that involves parents and families. Youth affirmed this need by describing their families as their life-lines and support systems.

LEGAL/PROCEDURAL REFORMS

Stakeholders were asked to share their opinions about a variety of delinquency-related policies and procedures including transfer of youth to the adult criminal system (bindover), gun and gang specifications (enhancements), waiver of counsel, blended sentences (serious youthful offenders), and the release process if sentenced to the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS). Additionally, stakeholders had the opportunity to discuss and name any policy or procedure that they deemed valuable or ineffectual.

Two issues immediately emerged as problematic – sex offender laws and competency to stand trial. Judges and attorneys asserted there is a substantial lack of policy and guidance as far as competency of juveniles and a majority of stakeholders indicated that the sex offender law (especially classification and registration) is in desperate need of revision. They described the law as overbroad, unclear, and ineffective. They also complained that it removed discretion from the courts and disregards what is known about adolescent brain development.

Judicial Discretion

Judges unanimously wanted more discretion to make decisions in all areas of case handling making this their primary desired reform second only to increased funding. Attorneys and probation/diversion officers generally favored discretion but shared concerns about arbitrariness and inconsistencies in cases. Sixty-two percent of law enforcement respondents felt that judges had adequate discretion; prosecutors were comfortable with judges having more discretion pertaining to status and sex offenses. All stakeholder groups supported practices that facilitated the juvenile justice system in taking an individualized approach to youth while balancing public safety.

The Adam Walsh mandatory sexual classifications are affecting how I handle cases. Not all kids who commit sex offenses should be labeled as sex offenders.

~ Prosecutor

Transfer, Serious Youthful Offenders, and Specifications

Transfer or bindover of youth to the adult criminal system is one of the most hotly debated topics in juvenile justice. Accordingly, stakeholders did not have consensus about this issue, although they acknowledged that where youth were amenable and it furthered public safety, offering youth rehabilitation through the juvenile system was preferable than treating youth as adults. Prosecutors favored bindover for serious offenses and probation/diversion officers supported the concept when it occurred after a comprehensive assessment of a child and the circumstances. Fifty-six percent of law enforcement respondents wanted more youth to be transferred but corresponding comments noted that it still must depend upon the situation – i.e. the individual and seriousness of crimes. Children’s attorneys and judges did not want transfer to adult court to be automatic or a presumption based on the type of offense. Judges preferred the discretionary bindover process as it obligates the court to conduct an in depth analysis and assessment of the youth and his/her needs.

Most stakeholders responded that they rarely see youth classified as serious youthful offenders (SYOs) and that it is a non-issue in Ohio. For example, probation/diversion officers, representing 77 out of the 88 Ohio counties, indicated that 25% never saw SYO dispositions 55% rarely did, 17%

encountered them several times a year, 2% frequently but they were often negotiated away, and 1% cited it as common practice. Some went as far to say blended sentencing has not worked and should be eliminated and others liked having a “safety net” for the most serious offenders and were not ready to dispense of the legal option.

I question mandatory sentencing for gun specs. I believe sentencing should be based on the crime and the risks and the needs of the youth.

~ Probation/Diversion

Stakeholders were also asked about the rate of recurrence and effectiveness of gun and gang specifications. Stakeholders revealed that gang specifications seldom appear in juvenile justice proceedings and for most of the state, gun specifications appear in complaints only several times a year. However, in densely urban areas there is a fairly high incidence of gun specifications, with some stakeholders calling it “routine.” Differences in opinion about effectiveness of specifications pertained to the

attached mandatory sentence and not whether the use of a weapon in the commission of a crime warranted special consideration. In alignment with their desire to have more discretion, judges and children's attorneys view specification generally as unhelpful as they tie judge's hands as far as appropriate dispositions and that they are often used as a bargaining chip to induce a plea agreement.¹¹ Prosecutors approved of having some mandatory time correspond to crimes that involve weapons. Many stakeholders indicated that they were not familiar enough with either specifications or SYOs to offer an opinion.

Legal Representation

Stakeholders were asked their opinions about the quality of legal representation in their local juvenile courts. There was recognition from all stakeholders that often juvenile court is the training ground for relatively new prosecutors and public defenders and that sustaining court-appointment lists with attorneys who have expertise in youth law is extremely difficult. While some counties had the resources to maintain experienced legal representation (both on behalf of the state and youth), many judges stated that they sometimes walk a fine line in the courtroom as they are conducting “on the job training” with the attorneys appearing before them. Stakeholders wanted government officials and the public to understand the complexity of the juvenile justice system and that there are more parties requiring representation in juvenile court than in other court system. Resources (both funding and training) must be allocated to ensure constitutional rights are being protected and the integrity of the juvenile justice system is upheld. Attorneys asked for training and other supportive resources that would help them in their jobs. Stakeholders suggested creating career-tracks in juvenile court, offering free legal continuing education, and seeking ways to counter the perception that the juvenile docket is not as important as the general division, and thus valued less by the public and legal community.

¹¹ Interestingly, SYOs were described by some as bargaining tools used by children’s attorneys and gun and gang specifications as prosecutorial tools.

OTHER ISSUES

Public Awareness

Stakeholders were asked what they would like the community to know about their work and juvenile justice. Many expressed that while their work was difficult, it was very rewarding. Adolescence is a time that individuals can truly be helped if relevant services and supports are in place. All stakeholders would like the public to have a better understanding of: the differences between youth and adults; the process and goal of the juvenile justice system; and the role the stakeholders play in it. Frustration was expressed about the way cases are sensationalized in the media and successes ignored, leading the public to be unaware of the overriding number of positive outcomes and fearful of youthful offenders. Stakeholders wanted the public to know:

- The juvenile court system has limitations.
- Many youth are helped and do not return to the system.
- It is repeat offenders who fill up juvenile court dockets.
- Poverty is a pervasive problem that poses barriers to services, education, and the provision of basic needs for families and youth.
- The community must be engaged earlier in children's lives.
- Effective services are expensive, but the return is enormous and saves costs in the long-term.
- Many families cannot access services without being system-involved (this needs to change) or they wait too long to seek assistance for their child.

Juvenile court is important because you can really make a difference.

~ Judge

Stakeholders are concerned that without improved awareness by the public about effective responses for youth and juvenile justice, chances for increased needed programming, funding, and procedural, legislative and systemic changes will likely not happen.

Reforms Stemming from *S.H. v. Stickerath*

Most stakeholders were not familiar with the details of the federal class action or settlement but some were aware of changes within ODYS even if they did not associate them with the case. The judiciary was the group most familiar with the litigation and settlement, but even within that constituency only those directly involved in reform efforts knew concretely about actions taken since the settlement. After learning about the terms of the settlement, stakeholders supported the changes and expressed the most interest in learning about the changes in risk assessment, the release authority, uniform case planning, regionalization of treatment options, the impact on RECLAIM, and rehabilitation and programming offered to youth while at ODYS institutions. Pertaining to the new release authority, stakeholders across the board supported the elimination of matrix time and

Legislators MUST familiarize themselves with their constituent courts. Let's not forget that we deal with children, so we cannot expect adult responses from them no matter what laws we pass or approaches we take

~Probation/Diversion

the use of case plans that follow youth from the onset of incarceration. Stakeholders hoped that the new processes will not become perfunctory and the goal of individualized approaches and the delivery of appropriate treatment would not be abandoned.

Stakeholders were asked how their communities have responded to the recent closure of ODYS institutions. The majority indicated that there has been little to no reaction. Judges, law enforcement, and prosecutors stated that they were not concerned with the closings per se, but mostly about the loss of specialized treatment (for sex offenders and for girls) and overall, having fewer options for placement. This was especially true since no community-based alternatives were yet in place, calling the planning “counter-intuitive.”

The subsequent issues were also frequently discussed by stakeholders:

I truly believe that the individual counties are best apt to handle their own issues without the unnecessary increase of mandates and controls. Funding needs to be maintained or increased in order to provide the best services possible to their local jurisdictions and youth.

~Probation/Diversion

- Status offenses and complaints for domestic violence (hitting siblings or parents) are encumbering the juvenile court system. Stakeholders mentioned eliminating status offenses and revisiting the intent of domestic violence (intimate partner violence) or family violence (child abuse) laws as they pertain to the delinquency realm.
- Zero tolerance policies have failed and need to be abolished; the identification of special education needs is happening too late or not at all; and youth sentenced to state institutions need cohesive plans that will help them obtain education while in the institution and connect them back to their home school in a seamless manner.
- An enhanced knowledge base of the court system would help communities and families more accurately understand the limitations and goals of the system, such as the system was not established to function as a social service or to assist in parenting.
- Specialized dockets (e.g. drug, domestic violence, and mental health court) are valuable and should be expanded.
- Collaboration among stakeholders is critical in implementation of cohesive reforms and best practices.¹²

¹²Law enforcement was the group that most consistently identified the need for a better working relationship with the court.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Build a stronger understanding, cohesive response, and continuum-of-care among juvenile justice stakeholders and allied groups. Recommended steps:
 - Hold regional or county-based opportunities for dialogues including forums for providers and traditional stakeholders to come together to discuss addressing delinquency, substance abuse, mental health, and other issues holistically.
 - Offer free trainings to stakeholders about state reforms, legal procedural issues and national best practices.
 - Look for ways to leverage resources directly to the counties where services can be offered at low or no cost to families without system involvement.
 - Create systems of care that include intensive case management throughout the life of a delinquency case. Develop more alternatives for low to moderate risk youth that are community-based, family-centered, culturally competent, developmentally relevant, and well integrated with other child system components including health, education, and child welfare.

- 2) Engage communities and parents in stemming and addressing delinquency, including raising public awareness about the juvenile justice system. Recommended steps:
 - Hold town hall type meetings and other forums where those working on reforms are meeting with community members about prevention, reforms, and delinquency issues.
 - Create additional opportunities for parents of system-involved youth to have a voice in the process and to support one another.
 - Develop resources for parents to learn about the juvenile justice system so that they have a better understanding of the objectives and limitations of the system.
 - Build partnerships with schools, community-based organizations and informal networks to design programs that are prevention-based.
 - Continue raising public awareness about the juvenile justice system, best practices, and positive outcomes for youth by outreach to the media and the development of public education materials.

- 3) Address policies that are counter to the best interest of communities and youth. Recommended steps:
 - Educate law makers on national trends, Ohio-based reforms, and generally about the juvenile justice system.
 - Where feasible build-in more opportunities and change policies that allow for individualized case analysis, dispositional determinations that are based upon the youth's needs, life, resources, risk, and circumstances.
 - Create committees or multidisciplinary groups that are actively examining competency of children and sex offender laws.
 - Reform zero tolerance policies in school and require communities and schools to provide education to the most vulnerable youth.

CONCLUSION

Overall, considerable input was gathered from stakeholders. While there was not absolute unanimity on all aspects of Ohio's juvenile justice system, there were significant areas of consensus about what works when it comes to assisting delinquent youth, key barriers to meeting the needs of youth, and required resources to address those barriers. Efforts should continue to engage these and other stakeholder groups in juvenile justice reform. Stakeholders are invested in positive outcomes for youth and want to collectively work toward that goal.

CHART OF STAKEHOLDER DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Type of Stakeholder	Mode of Collection	Geographic Area
Judiciary	Focus groups	Seven hosting counties (Delaware, Franklin, Huron, Lucas, Montgomery, Summit and Ross) inviting participation from a 31 county area (not all counties participated).
Children's Attorneys	Focus group and online survey	Responses from 30 counties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 62% private attorneys - 43% public defenders - 38% court appointed - 52% urban, 9.5% rural, 29% suburban, and 9.5% statewide
Probation/Diversion Officers	Focus group and online survey	Responses from 77 counties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 40% probation officers - 14% diversion officers - 42% rural, 35% urban, 20% suburban, and 3% statewide
Law Enforcement	Online survey	Responses from 57 counties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City police department (39%) - Sheriff (30%) - 31% specialized in crimes in youth - 44% rural, 20% urban, 33% suburban, and 3% statewide
Youth and Families	Focus group and telephone and in-person interviews	Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Medina, Lorain and at three institutions
Prosecuting Attorneys	Online survey	Responses from 21 counties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 68% from rural, 18% suburban, and 14% urban areas - 100% work on delinquency cases and 41% also appear in dependency, 86% in transfer hearings, and 50% in adult criminal cases