Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge has focused great attention on the issues of crime and delinquency and their impact upon crime victims. The day following his inauguration in 1995, Governor Ridge convened the General Assembly into special session to focus exclusively on issues relating to crime. This special session resulted in 37 Acts including 15 that directly impact the juvenile justice system.

In addition to legislative action, Governor Ridge recognized the need for improved planning and coordination of the juvenile justice system. In a June 25, 1996 letter to the Juvenile Advisory Committee (JAC), Governor Ridge formally challenged the state’s JAC to develop "a strategic plan to take Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system into the next century."

The Juvenile Advisory Committee (JAC) of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency is the state advisory group responsible for developing a plan for the state’s expenditure of federal formula grant funds allocated through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. These funds are disseminated to the states by the U. S. Department of Justice to support the mandates of this legislation.

With the Committee’s new responsibility of directing the future of the Commonwealth's juvenile justice system, the Governor reconstituted its membership to better represent the numerous state and local agencies involved in the administration of juvenile justice.

JAC Chairman Ron Sharp and members welcomed this new task with enthusiasm and devoted themselves to creating a strategic plan that would truly improve the practice of juvenile justice in Pennsylvania both for today and for the next century. The Committee envisioned the creation of a unified system that would administer justice in a fair and unbiased manner and provide the most effective response to each incidence of juvenile crime.

The creation of such an extensive and comprehensive plan required the Committee to divide into smaller, task-specific subcommittees to allow for the thorough investigation and resolution of the most prominent issues. The working structure of the JAC included the following Subcommittees:

- Vision and Mission;
- Prevention;
- Arrest, Prosecution and Victim Services;
- Implementation of Balanced/Restorative Justice Principles;
- System Collaboration and Funding; and
- Research and Evaluation.

The combined work of these Subcommittees and the full JAC totaled over 1,500 hours and culminated in the presentation of the strategic plan, “Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice: Analysis and Recommendations,” to Governor Ridge on July 21, 1997.
The plan included careful consideration of issues ranging from the creation of a stable and sufficient funding base for juvenile probation services to the passage of legislation to guarantee specific rights to the victims of juvenile crime. Perhaps more important than any one specific recommendation, however, is the preamble to the report in which the Committee presents a unified mission statement for the juvenile justice system that addresses the needs of all system clients including the youth, their families, the victims and the citizens of Pennsylvania. According to Senior Judge Emanuel A. Cassimatis, who chaired the Vision and Mission Subcommittee, the mission statement must be “more than a simple war cry.” It’s goal must be “to energize and empower all Pennsylvanians.”

This issue of Pennsylvania Progress is dedicated to furthering the work of the JAC by educating readers about the new mission of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system and the guiding principles that were designed to direct the every day practice of juvenile justice.

A NEW MISSION

The goal of the JAC was to develop a mission statement that could encompass the broad spectrum of services included in the juvenile justice system. The Vision and Mission Subcommittee looked first towards the purpose of the juvenile justice system as redefined in Special Session Act 33 of 1995. This legislation embodies the principles of Balanced and Restorative Justice by requiring the system to “provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community.” With appreciation of the importance of this new philosophy, the JAC enthusiastically adopted the following mission statement.

“JUVENILE JUSTICE:
COMMUNITY PROTECTION;
VICTIM RESTORATION;
YOUTH REDEMPTION.”

Community Protection refers to the fundamental right of all Pennsylvania citizens to both be and feel safe from crime.

Victim Restoration emphasizes that crimes can forever change victims and the goals of victim restoration programs and services should be to restore the victim, to the greatest extent possible, to his/her pre-crime status.

Youth Redemption embodies the belief that the vast majority of juvenile offenders are capable of change and have strengths upon which treatment services can build.

Furthermore, all of the services designed and implemented to achieve this mission and all hearings and decisions under the Juvenile Act—indeed all aspects of the juvenile justice system—must be provided in a fair and unbiased manner. The United States and Pennsylvania Constitutions guarantee rights and privileges to all citizens regardless of race, color, creed, gender, national origin or handicap.

(Mission statement, definition and comments taken directly from “Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice: Analysis and Recommendations,” Juvenile Advisory Committee, June 30, 1997.)

Promoting Best Practice

While the mission statement provides a unified directive for the juvenile justice system and its many components, it alone is not sufficient to guide the everyday intricacies of practicing juvenile justice. The JAC and its Vision and Mission Subcommittee sought to further specify how these broad goals could and should be operationalized. The Guiding Principles, (presented on page 3) complement the Mission Statement, expanding upon its vision and further defining best practice procedures.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and its JAC are working to educate all juvenile justice and related professionals, as well as the general public on the new mission statement and the guiding principles for the juvenile justice system.

Recently, with funding assistance from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, its Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research, and the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers presented six regional training sessions on implementing Balanced and Restorative Justice. As an integral part of these trainings, Senior Judge Emmanuel A. Cassimatis spoke to the audience on the importance of incorporating and implementing the new mission into all aspects of the juvenile justice system.
system. According to Judge Cassimatis: “Our aspiration is that the new mandate will be at the heart of all efforts and initiatives in juvenile justice reform. The mission statement can unify and guide future juvenile justice policy, programming decisions, and, indeed, even day to day operations. It can be our road map into the 21st century.”

In addition to the mission statement and guiding principles, it should be noted that the JAC’s strategic plan included 25 action-related recommendations. One year after the submission of the plan, the JAC is encouraged that the Governor has provided the leadership for the implementation of four recommendations and that positive action has been taken on many others. The JAC will update the plan on an annual basis to address emerging issues and challenges facing the juvenile justice system.

To receive additional information on the Mission Statement and The Guiding Principles for Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system, please contact: Megan Kurlychek at (717) 233-3343.

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### THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Juvenile Advisory Committee believes:

The juvenile justice system must have sufficient capacity, in terms of staffing and program resources, to provide an immediate and effective response to incidents of juvenile crime.

Every decision made, and every service offered, must be designed to provide balanced attention to the needs of the community, the victim and the offenders in an unbiased and fair manner.

The juvenile justice system must have a stable and sufficient funding source that supports all aspects of service delivery. In turn, the juvenile justice system must be held accountable for the responsible expenditure of funds.

The juvenile justice system must have strong responsible leadership to insure coordination.

The juvenile justice system must have the ability to plan to meet the needs of the future.

The juvenile justice system must be part of a strong integrated network of service systems with compatible missions and beliefs because neither the juvenile justice system, nor any other system, can address all the needs of victims, offenders, at-risk juveniles and the community it services.

Timely and accurate information is crucial to the design and operation of an effective juvenile justice system. Sufficient data collection, data management and research capabilities are crucial to system coordination, program monitoring, evaluation and proactive planning to meet the needs of the future.

The juvenile justice system must continue to emphasize the development of prevention and intervention programs designed to reduce the levels of violent crime perpetrated by juveniles.

The juvenile justice system must continue to emphasize the development of prevention and intervention programs and services designed to reduce the disproportionate representation of minority youths in Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system.

The juvenile justice system must make placement decisions based on the principle of the least restrictive alternative consistent with the needs of the youth, the victim and the community. When out-of-home placement is warranted, placements should be made to facilities that, when appropriate, provide for the continued involvement of the family.

Local communities provide the greatest resource in both preventing and responding to juvenile crime. The participation of community organizations in all aspects of juvenile justice must be encouraged and community members must be provided with basic information on the function of the juvenile justice system, its mission and guiding principles.

All aspects of the juvenile justice system must work to provide year-round education and training opportunities for youths in residential placement because education is crucial to helping youths meet their full potential.

All clients of the juvenile justice system—offenders and their families, victims and the community—must be served by highly trained, competent and caring staff who are prepared to respond appropriately and with sensitivity to individual and cultural differences and who treat all clients with respect, courtesy and dignity.

Juvenile justice professionals, who service victims, the community, and juvenile offenders and their families, must be treated with respect and dignity, have clearly established expectations and standards for performance, be evaluated regularly and be compensated appropriately and fairly for their efforts.
ATTENTION: RECIPIENT

If label is incorrect, please make corrections and return label to NCJJ.

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