



*DJJ Deputy General Counsel and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs testify on the Resident Advocacy Program before the Juvenile Justice Committee.*

## **DJJ Testifies before the New York City Council** **on the Resident Advocacy Program**

On Tuesday, September 22, 2008, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) presented testimony to the Juvenile Justice Committee of the New York City Council on the newly implemented Resident Advocacy Program (RAP). Nicole Halsey, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Russell Steinberg, Deputy General Counsel, delivered the testimony to Chair Sara M. Gonzalez and members of the Committee.

During the hearing, DJJ described the RAP, which was implemented on July 1, 2008, as a program designed to monitor the quality of services provided to youth in detention and increase the Department's responsiveness to the youth's concerns. The key components of the program are the Ombudsmen, who work out of each of the Department's three secure detention facilities and interact with the youth in detention, addressing their concerns and investigating any complaints the youth may have. Each of the three Ombudsmen have years of experience with the residents of DJJ and held the same role under the previous youth advocacy program.

The Department further explained that the work of the RAP and the Ombudsmen is bolstered by a committee made up of individuals not associated with DJJ, known as the Resident Advocacy Program Committee, who serve as advocates to help resolve concerns raised by youth that cannot be addressed solely by the Ombudsmen. It was further explained that the Ombudsmen and the Committee are able to utilize the Department's Office of Strategic Planning to attain accurate data that will help track complaints and illustrate trends in the Department's facilities.

Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Nicole Halsey described the RAP as "Another example of the Department's commitment to youth in the City's juvenile detention facilities. RAP provides youth with an outlet for complaints, and supports a system that will respond to their issues in a timely and informed manner."

Chair Gonzalez and the members of the Juvenile Justice Committee welcomed the Department's testimony and expressed interest in continued participation with the RAP. Deputy General Counsel Russell Steinberg described the hearing as "An excellent opportunity for DJJ to inform the Juvenile Justice Committee about this program, which will improve childcare and advocacy for youth in the Department's secure facilities."

