



Deputy Commissioner Herman Dawson and Assistant Commissioner Nina Aledort testify at City Council hearing.

Deputy Commissioner Dawson Testifies Before City Council **On DJJ’s Release To Parent Initiative**

On April 28, 2008, Deputy Commissioner for Legal Affairs and General Counsel Herman L. Dawson testified at an oversight hearing of the City Council’s Committee on Juvenile Justice concerning the status and progress of DJJ’s Release to Parent Initiative. Joining him were Assistant Commissioner for Program Services Nina Aledort and Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Planning Christopher Fischer.

Deputy Commissioner Dawson’s testimony focused on the progress of RTP since its inception on October 30, 2007. Deputy Commissioner Dawson reported that admissions to detention have increased by 10.2 percent during the first four months of the fiscal year, as compared to the same period last fiscal year. Since October, thirty-one percent of the 256 youth eligible for release were sent home to their parents with a Family Court Appearance Ticket (FCAT) and each one of them returned for probation intake the next day Family Court was in session.

Members of the Committee on Juvenile Justice learned that DJJ is now working to incorporate a Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI) created by the Vera Institute for Justice in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Coordinator’s Office.

Deputy Commissioner Dawson added that, “The Release to Parent Initiative is poised to have a significant impact on admissions to detention. By using an evidenced-based, objective decision tool to assess and release youth, we will be helping to ensure that youth detained are truly those for whom detention is the only appropriate option.”

The members of the City Council’s Committee on Juvenile Justice consider RTP to be a critically important, as they understand the research that shows the longer a youth’s stay in detention, the more likely he or she is to continue in delinquency or to be placed in a state facility.

Deputy Commissioner Dawson also used the hearing as an opportunity to update the Council on the agency’s development of their Reentry Supports Program, in partnership with John Jay College. The program is designed to help youth and families navigate the juvenile justice system and connect them to community-based resources. The Reentry Supports Program will demystify the Family Court process by utilizing multi-media, multi-lingual court guides and Internet tools that use straightforward, easy-to-understand language geared toward youth and families.

