



New York City

Department of

Juvenile Justice

---

**Testimony of Judith Pincus  
First Deputy Commissioner  
New York City Department of Juvenile Justice**

before the

**New York City Council's  
Juvenile Justice Committee**

---

**Monday, February 25, 2008  
1 PM**

**16<sup>th</sup> Floor Hearing Room  
250 Broadway  
New York, NY**

**Oversight: Continuing to Examine the Department of Juvenile Justice's  
Collaborative Family Initiative**

Good Afternoon Chair Gonzalez and members of the Juvenile Justice Committee. I am Judith Pincus, First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Juvenile Justice. Joining me today are Herman Dawson, Deputy Commissioner for Legal Affairs and General Counsel, Nina Aledort, Assistant Commissioner for Program Services, and Nancy Jacobs, Executive Director of the Criminal Justice and Research Evaluation Center at John Jay College. We appreciate this opportunity to provide an update on the Department's Collaborative Family Initiative (CFI) which was successfully launched last year with the support of the Committee.

### **Background**

Many national stakeholders in the juvenile justice field acknowledge that addressing a youngster's mental health issues is essential to reducing and/or preventing juvenile delinquency. Nationally, over 600,000 youth are processed through juvenile detention centers each year, 70% of which have mental health disorders.<sup>1</sup>

As you know, the Department noted a similar trend in Fiscal 2007 in admissions of youth to detention in New York City: two-thirds were identified as having a mental health need. Department data reflected that these youth stayed an average of 68 days, compared to an overall average of 30 days for

---

<sup>1</sup> NCMHJJ (June 2006), *Research and Program Brief-Juvenile Diversion: Programs for Justice Involved Youth with Mental Health Disorders*

youth without identified mental health needs, and were more likely to be incarcerated.

Historically, the options for youth transitioning back to their communities with mental health needs have been limited. Additionally, the wait time for connections to psychiatric services in the community is typically between three and six months, no matter whom is in need of these services.

To address these issues within the City's detention system, the Department partnered with John Jay College to form CFI using funds allocated by the Juvenile Justice Committee. CFI is a discharge planning and reentry initiative that seeks to provide immediate mental health treatment, psychiatry, and family-focused supports and resources to youth with mental health needs returning to their communities from secure and non-secure detention.

CFI was created with an understanding that best-practice reentry planning begins while youth are in custody, and that families are the primary support and access point for youth to receive services in their communities.

The CFI enrollment process begins when a youth identified by the Department's contracted mental health provider is referred to the Department's Discharge Planning Unit as in need of further services in the community. These staff then reach out to parents/guardians to obtain consent to refer the family to the CFI community-based organization (CBO) best suited to their needs – with special attention paid to cultural and geographic concerns.

While the youth is in detention, the CBO reaches out to the family to begin engagement, and to assess the needs of the family and youth by conducting home visits, meeting the family members in the community, the office, at visits in detention, or at a convenient location for the family.

During family engagement, DJJ staff continue to work with the resident to ascertain interests, and appropriate activities. Once the family agrees to participation, DJJ and the CBO then facilitate a meeting with the resident in detention.

Once enrolled, the family and CBO work together until the judiciary releases the youth from DJJ custody. DJJ, the CBO and the parents work with the Court and the youth's legal representation to inform them of the availability of CFI services and the family's enrollment. Upon release, services begin in the community and continue for up to 90 days.

The community-based organizations that are contracted to participate in CFI are:

- Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, serving Queens and North Brooklyn;
- Friends of Island Academy, serving Manhattan and Staten Island;
- Full Circle Health, serving The Bronx and citywide;
- Good Shepherd Services, serving South Brooklyn; and
- Steinway Children and Family Services, serving Queens.

Since the enrollment process occurs in detention, upon release from custody, youth enrolled receive immediate psychiatry and/or mental health services from community providers. At the same time, families receive supportive counseling, direct mental health services if they have an unmet need, and referrals for other services. The immediacy of these services circumvents the long waiting time for psychiatric treatment more traditionally experienced in the community, due to the relative scarcity of resources. This remains a crucial part of the CFI design and implementation.

Not only does CFI provide crucial mental health services for youth; this initiative also builds capacity in New York City's family and adolescent mental health infrastructure. By doing so, we, as a City, are better equipped to serve court-involved youth and families.

February 19, 2008 marked the one-year anniversary of the first youth receiving services in the community through CFI and the Department is very pleased with the program's progress. Most importantly, CFI has given 65 youth and their families an opportunity to receive mental health and psychiatry services in their communities. It has also changed how these service providers perceive detention-involved youth and their families and enhanced their ability to provide appropriate services to this group.

### **Profile of Enrolled Youth**

Since CFI began, 281 youth have been referred to the program and

237 of these families were contacted by CBOs. Of these, 144 families consented to participate in CFI and to date, 65 youth have been released from detention. 11 youth and families are currently being assessed by CBOs for services in their communities. Six youth have been accepted to the program and are awaiting a judicial decision. A total of 93 families did not participate because they declined, the youth was not released or a youth was released to another program.

Here is a snapshot of those youth enrolled in CFI in the community:

- 17 releases were female, 48 were male.
- 39 (61%) youth released to CFI were admitted to detention for violent offenses.
- The average length of stay in detention for those youth who entered DJJ care after the start of CFI was 53 days.
  - For the 13 youth who were in DJJ care before the start of CFI, the average length of stay was 183 days.
  - When all youth enrolled in CFI in the community are included in the analysis together, the overall average length of stay was 79 days.
- 11 youth released were from the Bronx, 29 were from Brooklyn, 16 were from Queens and nine were from Manhattan.
- 24 (37%) youth enrolled in CFI had no prior juvenile detention history.

- 25 (39%) had one prior offense, 10 (16%) had two prior offenses, and 5 (8%) percent had three or more prior offenses.

### **Outcomes**

CFI has successfully brought the wait time for mental health services in the community for enrolled youth leaving detention down to zero. In addition, CFI has yielded several other positive results for youth and families enrolled in the program. For example, average lengths of stay for youth with mental health needs has been reduced from 68 days to 56 days, and readmission rates for this group are also down.

Yet, there have been some challenges to getting CFI-eligible youth released. Family Court judges are reluctant, in some cases, to release youth that may pose a flight risk or danger to the community. As mentioned during our prior hearing on CFI, the Department has significantly increased its advocacy for these youth by briefing juvenile justice stakeholders about the program at each of the five New York City Family Courts. The Department's outreach has also included meeting with and sending correspondence to Family Court and Supreme Court judges, briefing various delinquency panel attorneys, the Legal Aid Society, and City agencies involved in juvenile justice. Finally, the Department also implemented a CFI Court Report, which notifies the Judiciary that a youth and their family have been accepted into the program. This report also includes the community organization that will provide services and their

contact information, as well as the number of days the youth has been in detention.

The CFI community partners have been indispensable in helping us to connect youth to services at home. However, the Department was disappointed that the Staten Island provider, The Staten Island Mental Health Association, dropped out of the program. As a result, another provider has extended their services into Staten Island for youth referred to CFI from that borough. Although no youth have been enrolled in CFI from Staten Island, services are there when the need arises.

### **Next Steps**

In Fiscal Year 2007, the Department utilized \$667,000 of funding from the Juvenile Justice Committee to build and implement CFI. In Fiscal Year 2008, the program is funded by the Bloomberg Administration as part of a series of reform efforts in the City's juvenile justice system. In Fiscal Year 2009, the Department looks forward to fully institutionalize the program.

In conjunction with John Jay, the Department will be releasing an Interim Report on CFI. This report will include, in detail, the development of the program process, data on youth enrolled in the early phases of the program, and overall early outcomes. We will provide the Committee with a copy of the report as soon as it is available.

It is also encouraging that under Mayor Bloomberg and through the Council's leadership, youth in New York City now have a menu of detention alternatives options and vital post-release program services, such as CFI, which have been incorporated into the City's efforts to reform juvenile justice in New York City.

In closing, the Department would like to thank the Juvenile Justice Committee, through the leadership of Chair Gonzalez, for supporting the development and evaluation of this innovative and groundbreaking program. The Department looks forward to continuing a dialogue on ways to better serve court involved youth, and will continue to update the Committee on the progress of CFI.

My colleagues and I would be pleased to take your questions at this time.