



Commissioner Neil Hernandez and First Deputy Commissioner Judith Pincus discuss youth homelessness with New York City Council.

DJJ Discusses Link Between Runaway and Homeless Youth and Juvenile Justice Systems at City Council

On Wednesday, June 11, 2008, Commissioner Neil Hernandez testified before a joint hearing of the New York City Council Youth Services and Juvenile Justice Committees on preventing youth homelessness. The testimony provided by the Commissioner focused on examining the link between runaway and homeless youth and their experiences with the Juvenile Justice System. Commissioner Hernandez was joined at the hearing by DJJ First Deputy Commissioner Judith Pincus.

In his testimony, the Commissioner discussed the current state of the city’s juvenile justice system and current reform efforts as well as causes of youth homelessness measures to reduce detention usage and institutionalization, and the results of a recent data math between DJJ and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

Commissioner Hernandez noted that detention usage has dropped 4.5 percent between July 2007 and April 2008, and that the placement of youth into state detention facilities has decreased by 9 percent since last year and 30 percent since 2002.

Of the juvenile justice reform efforts discussed were the Collaborative Family Initiative (CFI), the Release to Parent (RTP) Initiative and the Reentry Supports Program (RSP). These programs work to reduce the risk factors of delinquency and have the potential to limit the factors that lead to youth homelessness by limiting a youth’s time in an institution while providing support in the community once the youth is released from detention.

The Commissioner also identified causes of youth homelessness, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, low education levels, unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, and prior institutionalization. It was noted that many of the Department’s reform initiatives target the causes of youth homelessness as they mirror many of the causes of juvenile delinquency. Also identified was the likelihood of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) youth that become homeless because of lack of support in their homes. Commissioner Hernandez noted that DJJ has in place policies and procedures to ensure LGBTQ youth are treated equally while in Department care.

Commissioner Hernandez also discussed a recent data match between DJJ and DYCD that compared data on youth who entered the DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) system in Fiscal Year 2007 with youth who had been or are currently in DJJ care. The results showed that 7 percent of the youth that entered the DYCD RHY system had been at DJJ and that 61 percent of the youth had been released from State Office of Children and Family Services custody prior to their admission to DYCD. It was learned through the match that many similarities exist between the RHY population and the detention population, including a disproportionate number of youth coming from Brooklyn and the Bronx and a largely minority population.

In his conclusion of the testimony, Commissioner Hernandez pledged that the “Department of Juvenile Justice will continue working collaboratively with the City and State partner agencies to support reform of the Juvenile Justice system in the City to increase positive outcomes for youth.”

