



ACS Commissioner John Mattingly and Department of Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi discuss juvenile justice at the New School Forum.

‘Transformative Moment’ in Juvenile Justice Focus of Forum

A standing-room only crowd of nearly 300 enthusiastic juvenile justice leaders, stakeholders, advocates and professionals crowded into a New School for Social Research Forum on Feb.12th to participate in a panel discussion about the current “transformative moment” and gathering momentum to overhaul the City and State’s Juvenile Justice systems. The three main speakers were John B. Mattingly, Commissioner of Children’s Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice; Vincent Schiraldi, the new NYC Department of Probation Commissioner, and Gladys Carrion, Commissioner of the NY State Office of Children and Family Services. Jeremy Travis, the President of John Jay College and Jeremy Kohomban, Executive Director of Children’s Village, were also on the panel sponsored by the Center for an Urban Future at the New School.

“Young people and families can be helped to do better in their communities,” Commissioner Mattingly said, stressing the City’s intention to provide more alternatives to detention and placement opportunities following the merger of Children’s Services and the City’s Department of Juvenile Justice. “They don’t need to be driven deeper into the system to get help.” While explaining that “we take very seriously our responsibility to protect communities” from youth who have exhibited criminal behavior, the Commissioner said he intended to establish the key commitments that these young people “belong somewhere – to family, neighborhood, faith, City...won’t come out hurt...and will feel better about themselves and their future.”

Commissioner Mattingly emphasized that the changes in juvenile justice and the agency’s efforts to strengthen the child welfare system would take time and cost money – and would depend as well as the critical support of the State Legislature. “But in four years, we will look very different. We will have results.” He explained that the City had already been working for the past eight years to decrease the number of young people who are incarcerated, the length of time in incarceration, and a decrease in the number of re-arrests. Asking for support and prayers from the stakeholders, Mattingly said: “Stick with us.”

Commissioner Schiraldi, who recently assumed his position in NYC after four years as Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services in Washington, D.C., called most juvenile correctional facilities “factories for crime” and said most stakeholders “wouldn’t expose their own children” to the institutions where young people are currently sent in New York State and around the country. While the trend nationally has been a decrease in the number of young people who are incarcerated, Schiraldi pointed out that a critical issue has been that all too often - as in New York State - the funds saved by decreasing placement have not been re-directed to the cities for alternatives to placement. As a result, the decrease in care days has meant increased costs to NYC, not less. “We have to seal the deal on state realignment of money. We’ve taken the kids out of the state system, but the state is charging us more. We need bipartisan, statewide support to redistribute the money.”

Saying the “stars are aligned” for change, Commissioner Carrion declared: “We’ve firmly established that it’s a broken system. But there is political will now to change, and we are all working in partnership.” For too long, she said, “we were incarcerating too many children who posed little threat at great cost to the public, far away from their families and communities. We can do better.”

