

Response from Anita Alvarez

October 3, 2008

Elizabeth Clarke
President
Juvenile Justice Initiative
413 West Monroe
Springfield, IL 62704

Dear Ms. Clark,

As Chief Deputy of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to play a role in the implementation of many of the reforms that have taken place in the juvenile justice system here in Cook County. I believe the restorative justice and detention alternative innovations taking place in juvenile court, not only in Cook County, but across the country, are the future of criminal justice for all of our court and detention systems. If I am elected to the position of Cook County State's Attorney I will work to ensure that Cook County continues to lead the way in supporting these effective, cost saving and life-altering initiatives.

If elected State's Attorney, what actions will you take to ensure that youth will receive the best options for effective treatment and, if a petition is filed, the rehabilitative benefits of juvenile court?

The attorneys and supervising attorneys in juvenile court here in Cook County have embraced the principles of Balanced and Restorative Justice, (BARJ), and the philosophy that justice is measured not by how much punishment is meted out but by how much harm to the victim and community are repaired and how much accountability is instilled in, and competencies are developed in, the minor. The Cook County State's Attorney's Office has led the way in making BARJ the law in Illinois by amending the purpose and policy clause of Juvenile Court Act to include BARJ language. Also, the State's Attorney's Office has spearheaded the diversion programs, wherein status and low risk offenders are diverted from the court process into community based restorative justice programs. Our juvenile supervisors work with several community partnership committees to grow and foster and spread restorative justice programs in our schools and communities. As State's Attorney I would work to make sure Cook County continues to work with and foster BARJ practices, programs and community partnerships.

Additionally, cases involving youth who are eligible by statute for transfer to adult court or for an extended juvenile jurisdiction sentence are carefully screened by three levels of assistant state's attorneys. First, the assistant in the courtroom reviews the case and writes a memo recommending whether or not to seek to transfer the case or to seek an extended juvenile jurisdiction sentence.

The case and memo are then reviewed and discussed by the assistant's supervisor and the Chief of the Delinquency Division to insure that we seek a transfer or adult sentence only in the most appropriate of cases where juvenile court services either would not be effective or have been exhausted.

The State's Attorney's Office successfully removed drug offenses committed within 500 feet of certain locations from the automatic transfer statute because the law often resulted in low risk first time offenders receiving no juvenile services. We are and will continue to be firmly committed to seeing that every youth be afforded the services and restorative practices of juvenile court and its community partners to the greatest degree possible. If elected State's Attorney I will continue and foster this commitment.

If elected State's Attorney, what actions will you take to uphold the JJDP and philosophy to encourage preventative programs to deter delinquency and ensure an age-appropriate response provided with developmentally appropriate, evidence-based services and supports in facilities designed for juveniles?

In 2007 and 2008, the State's Attorney's office led the way in promoting BARJ principles by creating the first and second annual BARJ weeks. BARJ week is a week of education to spread public awareness of BARJ. It is also a week of celebrating the success of BARJ practices and principles by inviting public officials from Cook County to an awards reception at which youth who have succeeded in restorative programs and restorative justice community partners who have made a huge difference with troubled youth are honored. This year we honored Robert Spicer and the Community Justice for Youth Institute for their outstanding leadership in fostering peer juries and peace programs in many of Cook County schools. These programs resulted in the successful diversion of a significant number of youth from juvenile court into restorative peer and peace programs. We also honored Father Dave Kelly and the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation for their outstanding work in bringing together youth of different gangs and backgrounds into healing peace circles and also for providing restorative and competency building after school programs for youth.

The State's Attorney's Office also played a big part in the creation of the Juvenile Intervention and Support Center, the "JISC". The JISC is a pilot program involving several of the most high crime police districts in the City of Chicago. Under the program, youth who are arrested for less serious offenses are taken to the JISC instead of to the district. They are then carefully interviewed and screened in an effort to divert them from juvenile court and connect them with a community based organization that can intervene and heal the issues that led to the arrest situation. If elected, I will continue to facilitate restorative justice programs and honor and grow our community partners.

If elected State's Attorney, would you commit to taking a leadership role to ensure that diversionary programs would be available for youth charged with minor violations?

Yes, I am deeply committed to promoting diversionary programs for youth who have committed minor offenses. Under our initiatives, all juvenile assistant state's attorneys are extensively trained in the nuances of diverting low risk youth who have committed minor offenses into competency and accountability building programs.

If elected State's Attorney, how would you take a leadership role to continue the successful reduction in the use of detention and implementation of more effective programs for youth?

The Cook County State's Attorney's office has been an active participant in promoting the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, JDAI, in Cook County. We are active supporters of detention alternatives such as evening reporting, home confinement, electronic monitoring, shelter services, and Multisystemic Therapy as alternatives to detention. Cook County is a JDAI model site and our attorneys regularly speak to stakeholders from other jurisdictions promoting the benefits of detention alternatives. As State's attorney I will continue to create and promote the benefits to youth and the community of detention alternatives.

What is your vision for increasing community-based programming, reducing the number of youth inappropriately confined in the Department of Juvenile Justice, and improving successful outcomes for youth who are touched by the juvenile justice system?

The Cook County State's Attorney's office has promoted and fostered Redeploy Illinois programs designed to reduce the number of youth committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. The Chief of the delinquency division is and has been an active member of the Redeploy Illinois Board. The office has promoted and reviewed and provided oversight to Redeploy programs around the state and in Cook County. I have and will continue to firmly support and promote community based programs with a successful track record of rehabilitation as an alternative to incarceration.