

# ModelsforChange Illinois

## Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice

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## Elizabeth Clarke Honored as Champion for Change in Juvenile Justice Reform Will Be Recognized at National Meeting of System Reform Leaders

**CHICAGO** – Elizabeth Clarke, founder of the Juvenile Justice Initiative, is being honored as a Champion for Change in juvenile justice reform for her work building a statewide coalition and increasing public awareness of juvenile justice issues in Illinois. She is being recognized at a luncheon of juvenile justice reform advocates from across the country at the Third Annual Models for Change national conference in Washington, D.C., this week.

Models for Change is the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's \$120 million national initiative to reform juvenile justice across the country. Sixteen states are now involved – four working on a range of state and local reforms, and 12 as part of three action networks focusing on disproportionate minority contact, mental health, and now, juvenile indigent defense.

In 2000, Clarke founded the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI), a statewide advocacy coalition aimed at highlighting and supporting more effective, fair and rational juvenile justice policy and practice across the state. Using the latest research about adolescent development to educate the public and Illinois lawmakers, Clarke and JJI worked with a strong statewide coalition to educate legislators on approaches that hold youth accountable for misconduct, while relying primarily on community-based approaches to rehabilitation and treatment services.

The legislation pushed successfully by Clarke and JJI included the following:

- The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice was created through legislation passed by the General Assembly and signed by the governor in 2006. The legislation separated the juvenile division from the adult-oriented Department of Corrections and gave the new Department of Juvenile Justice a mission to rehabilitate and reduce recidivism.
- A state law that forced children accused of drug offenses into adult criminal courts was repealed in 2005. A JJI study this year found that the repeal of the automatic drug transfer law had no detrimental impact on public safety. In the first two years after the law was repealed, automatic transfers to adult court declined by almost two-thirds, and nearly 500 youth of color were afforded individualized assessment and treatment in juvenile court rather than being tried as adults.
- Redeploy Illinois was created as a pilot state government program to give financial support to counties that provide comprehensive services to delinquent youth in their home counties, instead of sending them to state facilities away from their homes and families. Since 2005, four pilot Redeploy Illinois sites have sent 226 fewer youth to state corrections, a potential cost savings of \$11 million.

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- Earlier this year, the governor signed legislation requiring the immediate appointment of legal counsel for minors taken into custody. The change, which will take effect Jan. 1, 2009, should enhance the quality of legal representation and increase the likelihood that juveniles will receive community-based services.
- In November, the General Assembly approved legislation (Senate Bill 2275) to raise the age to 18 (now age 17) when young people charged with misdemeanors are tried in adult court and to create a task force to study raising the age to 18 for felonies. The legislation, which would bring Illinois in line with laws in 38 other states and the federal government, awaits action by the governor. Enactment of the bill would increase the likelihood that 17-year-olds would receive the individualized interventions and community-based rehabilitative services needed to improve their lives and preserve community safety.

Clarke, a resident of Evanston, was selected as the award recipient by Models for Change Illinois leaders in recognition of her commitment to results and the demonstrable impact she has made on the lives of system-involved youth.

“Betsy has shown vision, creativity and committed leadership in advancing the goals of Models for Change,” said Diane Geraghty, Director of the Civitas ChildLaw Center at Loyola University Chicago and director of Models for Change Illinois. “Betsy has focused on using the legislative process to bring about systems reform in juvenile justice. She developed a novel approach to achieving policy reform and then built the infrastructure needed to put it into action.”

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### **About Models for Change Illinois**

Models for Change Illinois is focusing on bringing about change in three areas: (1) right-sizing the juvenile court’s jurisdiction, (2) expanding community-based alternatives to the confinement and formal processing of juveniles, and (3) addressing disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system. The work in all these areas is being carried out statewide, and five local demonstration projects are working with Models for Change to expand their array of alternatives to confinement.

### **About Models for Change**

[The Models for Change](#) initiative is an effort to create successful and replicable models of juvenile justice system reform through targeted investments in key states. With long-term funding and support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Models for Change seeks to accelerate progress toward a more rational, fair, effective, and developmentally appropriate juvenile justice system. [www.modelsforchange.net](http://www.modelsforchange.net)