

## Juvenile Justice Initiative Questionnaire

**Tony Peraica     Candidate for Cook County State's Attorney**

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

*If I am elected State's Attorney, one of my main priorities will be to change the manner in which non-violent juvenile offenders are treated. According to a report from the Justice Policy Institute, approximately 70% of youths in detention are detained for non-violent offenses. The cost to detain these individuals is far greater than the cost of alternative measures. Further, the likelihood of repeated and perhaps more violent offenses being committed in the future is dramatically increased for those who are placed into detention. As State's Attorney, my policy will be that detention should be utilized only as a last resort.*

*Instead of detention, attorneys on my staff will recommend rehabilitative friendly options for juvenile offenders. These will include, but not be limited to: mentoring programs, counseling, electronic monitoring and youth outreach programs. I will work with non-profit and faith-based groups as part of this process.*

*For those who are ultimately sent to the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center, the environment should be one where detainees are treated humanely by the staff, and where they are safe from violence. In recent years, this has not always been the case. As a Cook County Commissioner, I am aware that there have been many instances of abuse inflicted on juveniles, both by other juveniles and the staff as well. To remedy these and other problems with the facility, the county has retained Earl Dunlap, a respected expert in the area of juvenile corrections. Mr. Dunlap is working to reform this facility and make it a safe and humane environment for those who are housed there. I will work with Mr. Dunlap to ensure that conditions continue to improve at this facility.*

- 2) If elected State's Attorney, what actions will you take to uphold the JJDP A and the 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?**

*I am a supporter of the Juvenile Justice And Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A), and if elected State's Attorney will enforce an office policy of adherence to the JJDP A. This act is based on the premise that juveniles should not have contact with adults in a jail setting, and that juveniles committing regulatory (or "status") offenses should not be subject to detention.*

*If I am elected State's Attorney, one of my priorities will be to change the way the office deals with individuals who commit minor, non-violent offenses. As such, my office will not support detention for anyone committing such an offense. My office will work with counselors, non-profit and faith based groups and rehabilitation experts to deal with juveniles who engage in minor and status offenses.*

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

*Yes, I will commit to taking a leadership role to ensure that diversionary programs would be available to youths charged with minor violations. My goal as State's Attorney is to achieve compliance with the law. I do not believe detention is necessary to gain compliance in most cases. There are many excellent diversionary programs available, and I will look to these groups for assistance and input regarding juvenile justice issues if I am elected State's Attorney.*

- 4) 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?**

*If I am elected Cook County State's Attorney, I intend to form an allegiance with non-profit organizations and develop and utilize diversionary programs as a means of helping juveniles to become law abiding and well adjusted members of society. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, I believe that juveniles will be better serve and have a greater chance at rehabilitation if they are not placed into a detention facility. By placing non-violent juveniles in with those who are detained for violent offenses, we are dramatically increasing the likelihood of repeat offenses and of the non-violent offender becoming violent down the road. Second, I do not believe that detention of non-violent offenders is cost effective for the taxpayers.*

*As such, I will work with diversionary programs and ensure that adequate resources are focused towards currently existing diversionary programs like the drug school program currently used in Cook County that are worthwhile and effective.*

**5) 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?**

*I do not believe that most juvenile offenders are bad or evil; they are simply misguided or have made some unfortunate and unwise choices. I believe that these youths can become productive and well adjusted members of society if they have the proper guidance. Therefore, I intend to make community based diversion programs a reality for the State's Attorney's office, as I believe these programs will be a vastly superior alternative to warehousing troubled juveniles in a jail-like setting. Diverting these young people from detention will decrease the chances of them becoming violent, as well as lessening the rate of repeat offenses. These programs will also enable the county and state to realize cost savings over placing these individuals in detention.*

*For those who do wind up going to the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center, I will work with Mr. Dunlap or his successor to create an environment where juveniles can be safe and free from harassment and abuse. It is important that the detention facility retains professional counselors and makes use of rehabilitative programs to adequately prepare individuals to return to life outside the facility. This should be done to decrease the likelihood of recidivism.*

*Additionally, I am a staunch advocate of education. Many juveniles who enter the juvenile justice system do not complete high school. Today there are few jobs available for individuals who do not have at least a high school education. In addition to rehabilitation and diversion programs, I will work with non-profit groups that help non-high school graduates to obtain their graduate equivalent degree (GED).*