



October 1, 2008

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Elizabeth Clarke
President
Juvenile Justice Initiative Board of Directors
413 West Monroe
Springfield, Illinois 62704

Re: Juvenile Justice Questionnaire

Dear Ms. Clarke:

I apologize for the delay in responding to the Questionnaire. I am familiar with work of the Juvenile Justice Initiative and appreciate the work that you are doing for the juvenile justice system in Illinois. Changing how Winnebago County handles juvenile cases is one of the focal points of my campaign. I would encourage you to go to my website citizensforprorok.com for my plan.

Following are the responses to the questions you posed:

1. 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?

I believe in the concept of balanced and restorative justice. This takes into account the needs of the victim, offender and the community. It is done by holding the offender accountable for the harm that has been caused and providing opportunities to repair the harm when possible. It recognizes the need to keep the community safe by affording the community an opportunity to take responsibility for the well being of its members. Finally, it seeks to increase the pro-social skills of the youth to increase the likelihood that they will become productive citizens.

The first step would be to work with the Juvenile Probation Department to put into effect an effective assessment tool so that each youth coming into contact with the Juvenile Justice System is properly assessed for risk factors and needs. We need to know what is triggering the behavior if we are to effectively utilize community based alternatives.

Proper assessment will also assist in making more informed decisions on Extended Jurisdiction cases and Excluded Jurisdiction cases. Youth that are likely to benefit from community-based alternatives can be diverted by making charging decisions that will not mandate or make more likely detention as a sentencing option.

2. If elected State's Attorney, what actions will you take to uphold the JJDPa 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 think the best way to uphold the philosophy of the JJDPa is to assign seasoned prosecutors, defenders and judges to our juvenile court system. Winnebago County has been consistently assigned new judges and prosecutors and defenders right out of law school to juvenile court as if it were an entry level position. Experienced judges, prosecutors and defender bring life experience as well as legal experience that will enable them to make better decisions.

It is also important for the prosecutor to work closely with probation and the community alternative program providers to understand the risk factors each minor faces and the programs available to address those risk factors. Minors should only be referred to programs that have a proven track record of success.

3. 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?

Youth charged with minor violations, in almost every instance, should be diverted to programs such as Teen Court and Mediation Panels and should not be formally prosecuted. Currently, Winnebago County has only one Teen Court and does not have a mediation program. I would take the lead in encouraging the creation of additional Teen Courts and a Mediation Panel to serve as a diversion for those youth who commit relatively minor offenses.

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?

Winnebago County has had a juvenile assessment center adjacent to the Juvenile Detention Center for several years. Youth are taken to the assessment center for a certain class of offenses and screened to determine whether they need to be detained. This has significantly reduced the number of youth in detention.

I support the use of community-based alternatives in appropriate cases. During my campaign for State's Attorney I have met many people who encourage the use of alternative programs as opposed to detention. We need to channel youth to programs that have proven that they can have a positive impact on youth so that the behavior patterns and risk factors that caused the conduct can be addressed. We are more likely to be successful if we expand the use of community-based alternative and limit the use of detention to those youth who pose a risk to public safety or for whom other measures have failed.

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 am familiar with the Redeploy Illinois program. With the current state of affairs in Springfield, I would be reluctant to rely on any state government funded program. Winnebago County is one of the few counties in Illinois that has a Public Safety Sales tax. A portion of the proceeds of this tax is used to help fund a variety of community based alternative programs. Unfortunately, most of these programs are for adults but there are many programs in this area that do service youth and could be funded by the tax. I would encourage our county board to place a priority on funding additional alternative programs for youth with sales tax revenue.

Very truly yours,

Charles J. Prorok