

Juvenile Justice Initiative

413 West Monroe
Springfield, Illinois 62704
Telephone: 217-522-7970
www.jjustice.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 18, 2008

CONTACT: Betsy Clarke
847-894-4206

ILLINOIS MAKES MORE PROGRESS ON REFORM OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

SPRINGFIELD – Legislation aimed at increasing opportunities for rehabilitation of juveniles accused of crimes was signed into law recently by Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

Senate Bill 2118, which passed the General Assembly without any opposition, requires arrested youths to receive the advice of a lawyer early in the court process. By guaranteeing that youths can consult with an attorney prior to the detention hearing, youths more likely will receive community level rehabilitation services.

The legislation continues an effort by state leaders to reform the state's juvenile justice system by emphasizing rehabilitation where appropriate and helping youths grow into productive law-abiding citizens.

A 2007 study of the state's juvenile justice system found that children rarely meet their attorneys before their first court appearance, an obstacle to fair treatment that can reduce opportunities for rehabilitation. Although Illinois law has required that a detention hearing be held within 40 hours of a youth being taken into custody and that each youth must receive legal counsel, the study found children too often met their attorneys about the same time they walked into court. Senate Bill 2118 should correct that failure and give attorneys adequate time to learn about the case and their clients. The chief sponsors of the bill are Senators Kwame Raoul D-Chicago, and Michael Noland, D-Elgin, and Representative Art Turner, D-Chicago.

The 2007 report – *Illinois: An Assessment of Access to Counsel & Quality of Representation in Delinquency Proceedings* – was published by the Children and Family Justice Center of the Northwestern Law School and the National Juvenile Defender Center. A copy of the full report can be found at: www.njdc.info/pdf/illinois_assessment.pdf.

“This basic right to legal counsel will allow the defense attorney adequate time to meet with and interview the client prior to entering the detention hearing without additional expense or delay,” stated Elizabeth Clarke, President of the Juvenile Justice Initiative. “This change in law continues the tradition of the Illinois General Assembly by ensuring that juvenile justice policies are grounded in evidence-based practices such as reform of laws that require some juveniles to be transferred automatically to courts where they must be tried as adults.”

- more -

Ad 1
Juvenile Justice Initiative

“Illinois continues to provide the necessary leadership to ensure the best representation for juveniles,” stated Patricia Puritz, Executive Director of the National Juvenile Defender Center.

“This legislation recognizes the need to provide youth with the opportunity to consult with counsel prior to the first detention hearing to explore possible alternatives to confinement,” said George W. Timberlake, former Chief Judge, 2nd District. “This will further reduce the number of youth that are unnecessarily detained in Illinois simply because options other than detention were not always fully explored.”

“Senate Bill 2118 includes simple measures that ensure youth have the best representation possible prior to the first detention hearing,” said Diane Geraghty, Director of the Civitas ChildLaw Center at Loyola University Chicago, which oversees the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change juvenile justice reform initiative in Illinois. “Initiatives to keep youth out of confinement such as cutting-edge defense and community-based programs like Redeploy Illinois give youth the best opportunity to be successful, are the most cost-efficient, and keep communities safe.”

“All of the national research shows that youth who are in conflict with the law are best helped by a juvenile justice system with a strong focus on rehabilitation,” said Paula Woff, Senior Executive of Chicago Metropolis 2020 and Vice Chair of the Juvenile Justice Initiative. “By keeping them out of confinement but giving them rehabilitation services in their home communities, they have a much better chance of succeeding in life.”

###