

## JUVENILE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

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Dear :

As a candidate for \_\_\_\_\_ County State's Attorney, we would like to raise awareness of juvenile justice issues and inquire about your position on issues facing youth in your county and our state.

The Juvenile Justice Initiative is a non-profit, non-partisan, inclusive statewide coalition of state and local organizations, advocacy groups, legal educators, practitioners, community service providers, and child advocates supported by private donations from foundations and individuals. The Juvenile Justice Initiative seeks to transform the juvenile justice system in Illinois by reducing reliance on confinement, enhancing fairness for all youth, and developing a comprehensive continuum of community-based resources throughout the state. A list of our board members and more information about our organization can be found at our web site at: [www.jjustice.org](http://www.jjustice.org).

Our board is concerned about the youth involved with the juvenile justice system and interested in exploring the best methods to utilize national and international standards and evidence-based practices in treating youth fairly while maintaining public safety. New brain research shows the developmental differences between adolescents and adults, confirming that youth are far less able to gauge risks and consequences and most often grow out of this impulsive period of behavior. As a candidate seeking the position of State's Attorney, you have the potential to oversee and initiate numerous programs that can have a dramatic impact on the lives of youth and their ability to lead productive lives.

According to data from the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), your county is one of the top 16 counties in Illinois that together committed nearly 75 percent of the number of juvenile court admissions to the Department of Juvenile Justice in fiscal year 2006. The latest data shows that it costs over \$70,000 annually to incarcerate a youth in DJJ and the latest recidivism rate, or 3-year return rate, is estimated at 52.9 percent.

Given the critical importance of these issues, we are requesting that you express a clear vision for juvenile justice and respond to the questions below. **The Juvenile Justice Initiative is not endorsing any candidate, but we do intend to share your answers** with our board members and the public so they can be educated on these critical issues and may post the answers on our website.

1. According to the “Illinois Kids Count 2008” by Voices for Illinois Children:  
“Young people who penetrate the systems deeply—those who end up confined in locked detention centers and training schools—suffer some of the worst odds of long-term success of any youth cohort in our nation. Over their lifetime, they will achieve less educationally, work less and for lower wages, fail more frequently to form enduring families, experience more chronic health problems (including addiction), and suffer more imprisonment.”

In November 2007, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concluded:

“Transfer of youth to the adult criminal justice system typically results in greater subsequent crime, including violent crime, among transferred youth; therefore, transferring juveniles to the adult system is counterproductive as a strategy for preventing or reducing violence.”

**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?**

2. The federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) reauthorization is currently under consideration in Congress. According to the American Bar Association website:  
“Juvenile justice policy is based upon the IJA/ABA Juvenile Justice Standards, which were developed over many years through the contributions of judges, prosecutors, defenders and other juvenile justice professionals. The ABA supports reauthorization of JJDP, including the state mandates. The mandates are: (1) deinstitutionalization of status offenders; (2) sight and sound separation of juveniles from adult offenders; (3) removal of juveniles from adult jails and lock-ups; and (4) reduction of disproportionate minority contact with the justice system. ABA also opposes trying juveniles younger than 15 as adults, and believes that juvenile court judges should decide after a hearing whether a waiver of juvenile court jurisdiction is appropriate in a particular case.”

On July 31, 2008, the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee passed the reauthorization bill out of committee, which included an important amendment “sought by the ABA that would require states to phase out over three years the detention center confinement of “status offenders,” juveniles who engage in non-criminal violations such as truancy, run away from home and curfew violations.”

**If elected State’s Attorney, what actions will you take to uphold the JJDP 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?**

3. According to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, 42 percent of juvenile admissions are for “technical violations.” The ABA “opposes, in principle, “zero

tolerance" policies that have a discriminatory effect, or mandate either expulsion or referral of students to juvenile or criminal court, without regard to the circumstances or nature of the offense or the student's history.”

According to “Illinois Kids Count 2008” by Voices for Illinois Children:

“Far too many youth end up in the juvenile justice system inappropriately or unnecessarily, either because their needs are not addressed by public systems better positioned to serve them, or because they are prosecuted for relatively minor, common adolescent misbehaviors.”

**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?**

4. Cook County is home to the first juvenile court in the world, created back in 1899 by Jane Addams and many local citizen organizations. Cook County and the State of Illinois have been leaders in juvenile justice for over 100 years. In recent years, Cook County has led the nation in creating alternatives to detention such as evening reporting centers. Counties such as Ogle and DuPage have reduced the use of detention for technical violations. Many counties have successfully reduced the use of detention through better risk assessments and screening. Programs that successfully support youth without detention include evening reporting centers and home confinement. In successful jurisdictions, these programs and instruments are continually reviewed to ensure that youth receive programs in the most appropriate setting and that if they are held, it is for the shortest time possible. According to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority’s “Trends and Issues 2008,” the rate of juvenile detention admissions in Illinois decreased by 40 percent from between 1995 and 2005. The use of appropriate screening instruments and community-based alternatives has shown to be more effective and less expensive than detention.

**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?**

5. Established in 2003 by Public Act 093-0641, the Redeploy Illinois program provides selected pilot counties with funding for community-based services for non-violent youth who would otherwise be committed to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention research suggests that non-violent youth are less likely to be involved in subsequent delinquent behavior if they remain in their communities and receive appropriate services that address their underlying needs. Community-based options for juvenile offenders also are generally less costly than institutional care in correctional facilities. Redeploy Illinois programs are currently in five pilot sites in Illinois: Macon County, the 2nd Judicial Circuit (serving Crawford, Edwards, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jefferson, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, Wayne, and White counties), St. Clair County, Peoria County, and Cook County. By accepting the funds to provide community-based services to delinquent

youth, sites are obligated to reduce the number of youth DJJ commitments by 25 percent from the average number of commitments for the previous three years. According to the latest published report, the pilot sites, on average, reduced commitments to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice by 44 percent within their communities, or 226 fewer youth.

**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?**

Please respond to this inquiry by **October 3, 2008**. You can respond online by emailing your responses to Elizabeth Clarke at: [bcjuv@aol.com](mailto:bcjuv@aol.com) or send a hard copy to: **Juvenile Justice Initiative, 413 West Monroe, Springfield, IL 62704**.

The position of State's Attorney has the ability to determine the future direction of youth in your county and the State of Illinois. Thank you for your time to consider these issues, and please feel free to contact us for any information that you may need to complete this questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Juvenile Justice Initiative Board of Directors  
Elizabeth Clarke  
President  
Juvenile Justice Initiative