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Accomplishments in Juvenile Probation in California Over the Last Decade

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Prepared for the Chief Probation Officers of California
This research was conducted within RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment (ISE), a unit of the RAND Corporation, for the Chief Probation Officers of California. The mission of ISE is to improve the development, operation, use, and protection of society’s essential man-made and natural assets; and to enhance the related social assets of safety and security of individuals in transit and in their workplaces and communities.

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SUMMARY

Over the past ten years, probation departments across the state of California have seen a number of important changes in the way they do business. Beginning with Title IV-A-EA in 1993, departments began a system-wide “sea change,” from a focus on suppression, enforcement, and monitoring of youthful offenders to a focus on families and on rehabilitative and therapeutic approaches (Turner, et al., 2003). With the Comprehensive Youth Services Act/Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (CYSA/TANF) essentially replacing the Title IV-A-EA program in 1995, training conducted by departments on the 23 CYSA/TANF-eligible services and objectives helped to reinforce this message to line staff working directly with youths. In the course of a decade, the state undertook a number of major initiatives aimed at juvenile offenders and at-risk youths.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Title IV-A-EA

Title IV-A of the Social Security Act of 1935, as amended, established Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. California’s Department of Social Services, through the state’s Health and Human Services Agency, administered the AFDC program in the state and determined how Title IV-A funds were spent. All youths who were removed from their homes by a court order were potentially entitled to participate in the Emergency Assistance (EA) program of Title IV-A. California probation departments claimed reimbursement for eligible expenses under the Title IV-A-EA program from July 1993 through December 1995. Title IV-A-EA funding for county probation departments was approximately $150 million in fiscal year (FY) 1994/1995 and $120 million in FY 1995/1996.

Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant Program

In 1996 the California Legislature initiated the Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant Program as a major effort to determine what approaches were effective in reducing juvenile crime. The initial Challenge Grant provided $50 million to help counties identify, implement, and evaluate locally developed community-
based projects that targeted at-risk youths and young offenders. During the first 18 months of the Challenge Grant program, the California Board of Corrections (BOC) awarded over $45.9 million in demonstration grants to 14 California counties. In 1998, the Legislature amended the Challenge Grant legislation and provided $60 million in additional funding for new demonstration grants. Of the $60 million allocated by the Legislature, the BOC awarded over $56 million in three-year grants to 17 counties. County projects included a broad spectrum of interventions, and served more than 5,300 at-risk youths and juvenile offenders.

**Repeat Offender Prevention Program**

Repeat Offender Prevention Program (ROPP) was one of several initiatives undertaken by the Legislature in 1994 to respond to rising juvenile crime rates. ROPP funding began in FY1996/1997 and helped support six-year demonstration projects in seven counties. An eighth county (San Francisco) also took part in the last four years. The annual allocation for ROPP was $3.8 million. Each county developed its own program or programs, with an emphasis on a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency team-oriented approach. The fiscal year 2000/2001 state budget not only provided funding for existing ROPP programs, but also provided $5.7 million to support first year start-up activities for new projects and directed the BOC to award grants on a competitive basis. The BOC awarded available funds to eight counties, which are referred to as ROPP II.

**Comprehensive Youth Services Act/Temporary Assistance to Needy Families**

When the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was enacted, it created a new welfare program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The Welfare-to-Work Act of 1997, which implemented TANF in California, replacing the state’s AFDC with the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program and also created another program, the Comprehensive Youth Services Act (CYSA), which was enacted in FY 1997/1998, to fund juvenile probation services. California’s allocation of PRWORA funds was increased initially by $141 million in the first year and $168 million in subsequent years, based upon probation departments’ claiming for services provided. Counties began CYSA implementation in FY 1997/1998. Counties used CYSA/TANF to fund services and programs across the continuum of options, from prevention/early intervention through custody.
Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act

In 2000, the California Legislature passed the Schiff-Cardenas Crime Prevention Act, which authorized funding for county juvenile justice programs and designated the BOC as the administrator of funding. A 2001 Senate Bill extended the funding and changed the program’s name to the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA). This effort was designed to provide a stable funding source to counties for juvenile programs that have been proven effective in curbing crime among at-risk and young offenders. JJCPA currently supports 193 collaborative programs implemented in 56 counties to address locally identified needs in the continuum of responses to juvenile crime. Budget allocation for JJCPA was $121 million for the first year of the program. Counties reported that 98,703 minors participated in JJCPA programs during the first year of the program. An additional $116.3 million was allocated for the second year of JJCPA programs, during which 110,658 at-risk youths and young offenders received services. In its third year, $116.3 million was allocated for JJCPA funding, and 106,055 youths were served through JJCPA programs.

INDICATORS OF CHANGE

While we cannot establish any definitive cause-and-effect relationship between criminal justice and other outcomes and the many initiatives administered by the California Board of Corrections, the fact that the changes occurred during the same time frame that the initiatives were undertaken gives at least correlational support to the idea that California juveniles were affected by these initiatives.

Criminal Justice Indicators

Juvenile arrest rates have been declining steadily in California over the most recent ten years for which data are available. Arrests per 100,000 juveniles for felony or misdemeanor offenses in California have fallen from 6,550 in 1994 to 4,228 in 2003, a decline of 35%. Over the ten-year reference period, arrests for property offenses declined by 57%, arrests for violent offenses by 46%, and arrests for drug offenses by 52%. We note, however, that similar changes were observed nationwide.

Like arrest rates, juvenile incarceration rates dropped sharply over the ten-year reference period, from 109.0 per 100,000 juveniles in 1994, to 32.4 per 100,000 in 2003, a decline of 70% over ten years. From 1993 through 2002, new admissions to the California Youth Authority (CYA) declined from 3,640 in 1993 to 1,310 in 2002, a drop of 64%. The standing population of CYA youths also fell over the same period of time,
from 8,556 in 1993 to 5,954 in 2002, a 30% decline. Between the beginning of 1999 and the end of the third quarter of 2004, the standing population in probation ranches and camps has declined from 4,869 to 4,260, a 13% drop. During the same period of time, juvenile hall populations also fell by 9%, from 6,980 at the beginning of 1999 to 6,335 in the third quarter of 2004.¹

**Non-Criminal Justice Indicators**

**Teen Birth Rates.** The teen birth rate in California declined from 71.3 per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19 in 1993, to 41.4 in 2002, a drop of 42% over a ten-year period. After having a higher than the national average from 1994 through 1999, California had a lower rate of teen births than the country as a whole from 2000 through 2002.

**Children Living in Poverty.** The percentage of children living in poverty declined somewhat between 1994 and 2002, both in California and in the U.S. as a whole. In 1994, 50.3% of children in California were living at or below 200% poverty. By 2002, the percentage had declined to 41.2% of children, a decline of 18%. In 1994, 13.4% of California children in poverty were also without health insurance. By 2002, that number had fallen to 8.8%, a decline of 34%.

**Completion of High School.** Data on rates of high school graduation among persons aged 18 to 24 are available only in three-year averages for the years 1990-1992, 1994-1996, and 1998-2000. During that time, California’s graduation rate has increased from 77.3% to 82.5%.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The past ten years have ushered in a number of major initiatives in California’s juvenile probation system. Determining the effectiveness of these programs on statewide youth recidivism and other measures is not straightforward. Available evaluations of their impacts on participating youths have been positive. However, when one goes beyond the observed impacts of the programs on participating youth, it is harder to attribute observed statewide trends to these initiatives.²

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¹ We were not able to obtain similar measures for states other than California.

² For example, Worrall (2004) examined the impact of Challenge Grant funding on county arrest rates for juveniles. He found that funding was associated with little to no overall reductions in arrests for felonies, misdemeanors, and status offenses (Worrall, 2004, p. 471).
Overall, juvenile arrests and incarcerations in California have fallen over the past ten years, the number of teen pregnancies has dropped, the number of youths living below the poverty level has gone down, and graduation rates have increased. These positive measures are concomitant with probation initiatives. California’s trend on many measures mirrors nationwide trends, suggesting that something other than these initiatives may be at work. For example, the economy in California and nationwide (as measured by unemployment rates) improved during much of the decade examined. However, on certain measures, such as arrest rates and teen pregnancy rates, the decline over the past decade has been greater for California youths than for U.S. youths as a whole, suggesting that programs and initiatives in California may be having positive effects beyond the national trends. When we compared California with seven other large decentralized states, we found that each of these states—with the notable exception of Pennsylvania—experienced reductions in juvenile arrest rates over the past decade. All except Pennsylvania have instigated new initiatives during the decade in attempting to curb juvenile crime, but we are not able to directly link the initiatives to the reduction in arrest rates in any state, including California.

It is important to note, however, that statewide evaluations of recent initiatives in California have shown that criminal justice outcomes for program participants have generally been better than those for youths in routine probation programming, indicating the importance of this type of programming for at-risk and probation youths in California. Our ability to understand how the delivery of different services under these initiatives impacts youth justice and non-justice outcomes could be enhanced if better data were available on the types of youths who participated in the programs and the services that they received. With these data we could more definitely point to the program components that seem to make the most difference for youths with different needs.