



NEW HAMPSHIRE JUVENILE COURT DIVERSION NETWORK

PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES
IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

October 30, 2013

Dear Representative Walz,

On behalf of the New Hampshire Juvenile Court Diversion Network, and the Diversion programs within our State, I would like to thank you and the other Committee Representatives for taking the time to hear our concerns on Oct. 15th, 2013. We realize that your time is valuable, and we are so appreciative that you agreed to dedicate such a significant amount of that time to the passionate and positive conversation on the effectiveness of Juvenile Court Diversion, its cost savings, and the struggles that current Juvenile Diversion providers are facing.

To begin, I have highlighted the important points of our conversation on the 15th.

Juvenile Court Diversion is focused on diverting first-time youth offenders from the traditional Juvenile Justice System, towards an alternative resolution while holding the offender accountable. Diversion recognizes that youth offenders have made a mistake, yet requires that offenders to be held accountable to their communities. This approach, offers youth the opportunity to avoid a criminal record, yet often requires them to fulfill a more stringent, and community centered contract, than does traditional adjudication. Further, the intent of all NH's Juvenile Diversion organizations is to help youth and their families to make better choices, so that they may reach their greatest potential as valuable members of society. By admitting their offense and signing a contract in a Juvenile Diversion program, youth offenders take the first step in experiencing the effects and responsibility they hold as citizens.

Many of our NH Programs are focused on providing "Traditional Diversion" with Community Member Volunteer Accountability Panel's, while four offer the Restorative Justice Approach. A few of New Hampshire's programs are supported by County Governments, City Police Departments, or City Offices of Youth Services, while the majority of programs offer diversion as struggling non-profits. NH's Juvenile Diversion Sites need your support.

Research nationwide has proven that Juvenile Diversion practices provide an important developmental intervention in youth's contact with the Justice System. Further, research proves that Youth offenders, if able to run course through the Justice system are potential victims to Social Labeling Theory, lower levels of accountability, and burden the courts and municipal systems with higher costs of service than Juvenile Diversion. Lastly, Juvenile Diversion allows youth to be connected with their community, pre-screened for possible substance use and mental health issues, supported during adolescent family strife, and to benefit from education toolkits which are invaluable to navigate the complicated years of adolescence.

The obstacles that lie in the way of successful implementation of Statewide Diversion are in large part due to funding. With the recent elimination of Incentive Funds, many programs in NH have closed their doors, and many are on the brink of closure. Northern NH currently has no Juvenile Diversion programs for those youth most vulnerable in the Northern part of our state, unless we find a viable solution. It is sad to say that not all NH youth have the same chance to enter adulthood without a criminal record.

It is the firm belief of many in the Juvenile Justice and Diversion fields that the state needs to fund, at least in part, Juvenile Diversion. Nationwide, many states serve as models for Juvenile Diversion, and are wholly support by state dollars. Without some type of support from the State of NH, the youth of our state seem to become a forgotten low priority.

Juvenile Diversion serves to save NH taxpayers and lawmakers considerable costs, both in the short term, and long-term. Juvenile programming has an estimated cost of \$1200 per youth served, while formal court processing costs NH \$42,900 per youth per year for formal court processing. These annual cost savings are substantial to taxpayers in formal court processing, and the rate of court based recidivism. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation comparative analysis of recidivism rates, and cited by the 2013 Dartmouth College “Investigation of Current Practices for Handling Youth in the Criminal Justice System”, New Hampshire has a relatively high recidivism rate of 51.7% (McLaughlin, A. et. al. p.8). The Diversion Network programs have an average 86% success rate which, with sufficient support, will contribute to a reduction in the state recidivism rates.

With Juvenile Diversion providing such important services to New Hampshire’s families and communities, at such significant cost savings, it is imperative that we look to model states to study and support sustainable solutions for our Juvenile Court Diversion providers for years to come. NH’s kids deserve far better.

Best Regards,

Nicole E. Rodler

Nicole E. Rodler, Chair
New Hampshire Juvenile Court Diversion Network