

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on Improving Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System
February 28, 2017**

Today's hearing will explore ideas and solutions to improve outcomes for children in contact with the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile courts across the United States handle close to two million cases each year. The children who end up in our nation's juvenile detention facilities face different challenges and needs for services. Some are as young as eight or nine years old. Some have committed no crimes, but were locked up for truancy or violations of other laws that apply only to minors.

Some are runaways who landed in detention after fleeing abuse at home or a human trafficker. Some were locked up merely because they disobeyed a parent. Some are first-time, nonviolent offenders who have committed only misdemeanors.

I hope that today's hearing will help us understand if there are more innovative methods than locked confinement to improve outcomes for these nonviolent juvenile offenders. Ensuring the stability and future prosperity of these youths might call for something other than a stint in a juvenile detention facility, which costs taxpayers an average of about \$88,000 per year, per juvenile.

Each one of the children who land in our nation's detention facilities deserves our care and attention.

Those who broke laws that apply only to children, such as curfew violators and truants, face particularly great obstacles inside a detention facility. These young people not only will be separated from their families, but also may be confined with much older juvenile delinquents who committed rapes, robberies, or murders. They are at greater risk of sexual assault than other juveniles, research suggests.

I'm pleased to see that many communities already are seeking alternatives to juvenile detention for runaways, for youth in the foster care system, and for other nonviolent offenders who may have suffered abuse, trauma, poverty, or neglect before experiencing a brush with the law. I hope that today's hearing also will help us identify more cost-effective, community-based solutions to discourage future criminal behavior by juveniles.

To that end, our hearing will feature testimony from a panel of leading experts in the field of juvenile justice. We are privileged to have with us today Mr. David Kuker, who's worked on juvenile justice issues for the Iowa State government for over 20 years.

I also want to welcome Yasmin Vafa, who will testify on behalf of the group Rights4Girls. She is a lawyer as well as the co-founder and executive director of this organization, which advocates for services to runaways and victims of human trafficking.

We also welcome Jake Horowitz of The Pew Charitable Trusts. He will share some of the latest research findings on what initiatives work best with troubled youth in our justice system.

Finally, I want to highlight the example of Ms. Jinique Blyden, who will share her personal experience as a teenager in Florida's juvenile justice system. After successfully completing a diversion program, she transitioned back to her regular high school and plans to attend college in the fall.

Before I conclude, I want to thank my colleague, Senator Whitehouse, for working with me on juvenile justice reform. I look forward to working with him on this issue again in the coming year.

I also want to make a renewed call for Congress to pass the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act, a bill that I introduced with Senator Whitehouse in the last Congress.

This measure had 20 bipartisan cosponsors before the 114th Congress adjourned. It would encourage states to rely on policies and practices that reflect the most recent research on what works best with troubled youth.

For example, the legislation we introduced encourages states receiving juvenile justice formula grants to screen children for human trafficking, mental illness, and substance abuse issues. If it's enacted, states participating in the juvenile justice formula grants program could no longer lock up foster care children merely for running away from a foster home. It encourages states to end the shackling of pregnant girls in detention.

It calls for greater data collection, including reports on the use of isolation on juveniles in state or local detention facilities. And it includes language calling for states to ensure that juveniles will continue their education while in detention.

Our bill also would promote greater accountability in government spending. Two years ago, this Committee heard from multiple whistleblowers that reforms are needed to restore the integrity of the formula grant program that is the centerpiece of our current juvenile justice law. The Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention administers this formula grant program.

The formula grant program would be continued for five more years under our legislation, but the measure also requires the Justice Department to do much more oversight.

The measure we crafted also calls for evidence-based programs to be accorded priority in federal funding. The goal is to ensure that scarce federal resources for juvenile justice will be devoted mostly to the programs that research shows have the greatest merit and will yield the best results with at-risk adolescents.

A coalition of over 100 nonprofit organizations, led by the Campaign for Youth Justice and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, worked closely with us on this bill's development in the 114th

Congress. Fight Crime Invest in Kids, Boys Town, Rights4Girls, the National Criminal Justice Association, the National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National District Attorneys Association also endorsed this measure. Senator Whitehouse and I are grateful for their support of our efforts and we look forward to working with them again this year. I now recognize Senator Whitehouse for his opening statement.