

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing on “Improving Accountability and Oversight of Juvenile Justice Grants”
April 21, 2015**

Today we examine a very important topic: the management of juvenile justice grants to states. Federal grants that help states improve their juvenile justice systems and prevent young people from becoming involved in crime can transform communities. I have seen firsthand the success of such efforts in my home state of Vermont. In order to achieve successful outcomes, however, it is critical that both federal and state officials are good stewards of these grants - the safety of our youth and our communities depend on it. I share Chairman Grassley’s commitment to ensuring these grants are responsibly managed and overseen at every level.

Most of these grants are authorized by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), which has helped provide crucial services for young people for the last 40 years. These services keep our communities safe by reducing juvenile crime, advancing programs and policies that keep children out of the criminal justice system, and encouraging states to implement policies designed to steer those children who do enter the juvenile justice system back on track to become contributing members of society.

First enacted in 1974, the last five-year reauthorization was in 2002. I led JJDP reauthorization efforts in 2008 and 2009, and both years the bills were reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, but were never considered by the full Senate. I thank Chairman Grassley and Senator Whitehouse for their continuing efforts to reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. I am hopeful we can do so this Congress.

As we consider reauthorization, we must examine what is working and what needs improvement. We have a responsibility to ensure that grantees get the guidance they need to comply with federal standards, and are held accountable if they fall short. I appreciate the witnesses who are here today to tell us about problems they have encountered with the administration of these programs. We must be transparent about the challenges if we are to build a stronger system and help young people more effectively.

The JJDP has benefitted countless young people and communities over the past 40 years, and I want to mention just a few examples of the important services the JJDP has made possible in Vermont. The Juvenile Drug Court for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties is funded by the JJDP and provides proactive intervention and treatment for youth who struggle with substance abuse. Under the supervision of a judge, a team of attorneys, counselors, and educators works with each young person to develop a plan for success. These grants fund job readiness and conflict resolution programming for youth at the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, and trainings for Woodside staff to perform effective youth assessment screenings. The JJDP has supported a truancy program in Chittenden County that has had great success identifying which children

are missing school and then working with those children and their families to address the causes and get them back on track. All of these programs are vitally important to helping young people become successful, productive adults. Our communities are stronger and safer when these programs are administered responsibly and efficiently.

The latest JJDPa reauthorization, introduced last year, contains many important improvements in services and protections for youth, and it increases accountability measures to ensure state compliance with federal standards. Importantly, it requires states to identify racial and ethnic disparities in their juvenile justice systems, and develop strategies to reduce them. I look forward to working with Chairman Grassley and Senator Whitehouse on reintroduction of this legislation to ensure our youth get the services they need to succeed.

I thank our witnesses who are here today to represent a broad range of expertise on the administration and impact of these grants. Your perspective on this issue is extremely valuable, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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