June 12, 2012

To the Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council:

My name is Mori Hitchcock and I am an entering freshman at Juniata College. I participated for 2 years with Chester Youth Courts, and I served as the judge for most cases. I also served as judge for the first ever Municipal Youth Court hearing. Municipal Youth Court is an alternative to the juvenile justice system that allows cases to be heard by youth and really enforces the restorative justice aspect that we feel is missing from the court.

Youth court has helped me realize my leadership potential. Students and faculty recognize me as a leader in the courts although I serve no leadership roles. This leadership potential has allowed me to become the “voice” of the youth court. Through youth court I have become a symbol of progress and someone that the younger students look up to. Youth court as a whole is respected in my school; even though the dispositions may seem harsh, students are still willing to participate and they eventually see the benefits.

It has also helped the other students and I gain a better understanding of the law and the court system. I have learned that youth courts are a great way to reduce the number of unnecessary suspensions that occur in my school. It gives the opportunity for students who care about the welfare of their misunderstood peers to be able to make a difference. It has helped the activist in me realize that you can work in tandem with the school in order to benefit everyone. Youth court has helped me experience some of the job options available to me if I were to pursue a career in criminal justice or law.

I have established so many connections and relationships through youth court that I don’t think I could have made elsewhere. It was a great two years and I honestly wish I could continue to work with the youth courts in my city and others. Thank you for taking time out to hear my testimony, and I hope you continue to see the value of youth courts.
Good Afternoon members of the Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council,

My Name is Brian Foster and I am an alum of Chester High School class of 2011 and also a founding member of the Chester High Youth Court. I am submitting this testimony because I care about the youth and their development and I realize what is going on in the community. I was once a youth who faced many hardships when I attended grade school. Getting into fights and being disrespectful was a lifestyle that I accepted at the time. I got to the point where I didn’t want to be like my older siblings who faced jail time, who then continued to live their life as if it was worth little. I became involved with the Chester Upland Youth Court as an underclassman who was familiar with violence. I always was a fighter at heart because I thought I had something to prove. I surrounded myself with friends who had the same attitude. It got to the point where they attacked somebody that I knew. I didn’t tell authorities who it was and that caused me to get into a lot of trouble. The Youth Court was an outlet for me. It helped me shape myself differently. How I act today is a result of how the youth court pushed me to better myself. I honestly think Youth Courts are beneficial. For me, representing some of the youth in Chester PA, the Youth Court has opened doors and has given resources that the streets could never give to me. It shows the leadership potential that I never knew I had. I was once a troubled youth who turned into a leader. Over the years of being involved with Youth Court, I have also grown as a team player. I know for a fact that most of the missions that the youth court had couldn’t have been done without a strong team. Even though I became a leader in my last years of high school, my job wouldn’t have been effective without a team to lead and accomplish things with. I have been in the youth court for all four years of High school and now I am a rising sophomore at Art Institute of Philadelphia. I’m absolutely positive if the youth got the opportunity I had, the Youth Court can be a major component in this fight against the violence. The Youth Court is an alternative disciplinary program that is designed to help youth make better decisions in life. I want the youth to be safe and this is one of many ways to help solve this issue on our
hands. I want to thank the members of the City Council for this opportunity to share my testimony. Chester Youth Court has been instrumental in my development and I hope that you will continue to invest both time and resources in the program.
Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council

Youth Court Hearings-Room 400 City Council Chambers
June 19, 2012

I. Youth Courts Past and Present

“The law is when they indict you for something you didn’t do.” Chester student, 2008.

Youth courts are an alternative juvenile justice or school-based disciplinary system, operated by students trained by lawyers, law students, teachers, or other professionals. Students use positive peer pressure to achieve restorative justice. The goals of Pennsylvania’s restorative justice statute are public safety, repairing the harm caused, and providing competency skills to the offender to prevent the behavior in the future. Neuroscience has confirmed that the adolescent brain does not mature until youth reach the age of 22-23. To punish youth for bad behavior is often misguided in that youth need is to reflect and be guided—something youth courts are good at accomplishing. Youth who have gone through the youth courts generally believe it is more fair than adult discipline.

In 2007 I helped implement the first youth court in Chester City. In January, 2009 the Stoneleigh Foundation awarded a fellowship to me to expand youth courts in Chester City and initiate a statewide youth court movement. In 2010 two Chester youth court members testified at PA juvenile justice hearings that youth court had changed their lives.

http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/testimony-chester-high-school-youth-court-members

Three U. Penn law students helped me research youth court statutes in other states and a youth court bill was submitted to state officials in 2011. In May, 2011 the PBA unanimously passed a youth court resolution calling for youth court expansion into all PA counties, a public-private partnership to support that expansion, and for legislation to establish standards and quality courts. There are 1,100 youth courts in the U.S. and 2/3 are juvenile justice-based and 1/3 are school-based. Youth courts can be run as after-school programs or integrated within social studies classes. There are less than 20 youth courts in PA. (See link to survey of PA youth courts on Stoneleigh Foundation website.)

http://stoneleighfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Canvas%20of%20Pennsylvania%20Youth%20Courts%20Report_0.pdf

Since 2007 we have trained fifteen groups of students in Chester to operate youth courts. They were primarily high school students but also included students as young as sixth grade. Chester had six functioning youth courts this past year. Students learn to run a youth court in twenty sessions of forty-five minute duration. See links to video training tape and Youth Court Coordinator’s Manual.

http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/how-run-youth-court
http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/youth-court-coordinators-manual
II. LESSONS LEARNED

“If it were not for youth court I would be in a gang.” Chester student July, 2008.

1) Youth courts allow youth to experience power;
2) Youth understand their own culture far better than adults do;
3) Youth courts allow youth to participate directly in civic engagement;
4) Everybody likes youth courts once they learn how they empower youth;
5) Seeing a youth court hearing supports the aphorism that seeing is believing;
6) Youth courts can be operated within schools for very little cost;
7) Youth courts allow youth to participate in a community of practice-youth learn collectively as a group instead of individual learning. This has profound implications for public education-particularly in urban environments with dangerous streets, challenged families, and schools with inadequate resources.

III. YOUTH COURT JUSTICE AND EDUCATION BENEFITS

“Youth court is the most challenging thing I experience at school.” Chester student, 2008.

Respondent (Student Offender) Benefits:
1) Lower recidivism rates;
2) Opportunity for students to tell their story;
3) Youth stay in school instead of being suspended;
4) Youth experience justice not as authoritarian edicts from adults but as determined and applied by a jury of their peers.

Youth Court Member Benefits:
1) Youth court members learn cognitive skills - to focus and listen closely, follow a complex fact pattern, deliberate in a body, and form a just disposition;
2) Students enhance public speaking skills;
3) Students develop communication skills and learn the value of teamwork;
4) Students improve their attitude towards the legal system;
5) Youth court members graduate because they have learned responsibility;
6) Students reexamine values-why we have rules, consequences and accountability;
7) Students become empowered, realizing they can contribute to their community.

In summary youth courts allow youth court members to acquire a wide range of academic, socialization and civic engagement skills. They contribute to safer schools, are cost efficient, and establish youth as resources contributing to youth justice. The skills acquired (rigorous thinking and analysis) are exactly the kind of skills we want an educational system to provide. They will use these skills the rest of their lives.

IV. ADVANCING THE WORK: A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

“The American Dream is getting out of bed in the morning, going outside and not believing you are going to be shot.”
In July, 2011 the U.S. Department of Education and Justice created a joint collaboration called the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI) whose objective is to end the school-to-prison pipeline and replace it with a school-to-career platform. Youth courts are the most replicated program in the arsenal of tools promoted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the U.S. Department of Justice. They are a preferred disciplinary system and provide academic, socialization and civic engagement skills students will use as adults.

Although a formal Pennsylvania public-private partnership to expand youth courts is still in discussions the major participants in that dialogue include: 1) The Stoneleigh Foundation; 2) The Pennsylvania Bar Association; 3) EducationWorks; 4) Physicians for Social Responsibility; 5) Delaware County/York County/Allegheny Bar Associations; 6) private law firms and law schools; 7) U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania (they assisted me in training a group of tenth graders in Chester to operate a youth court this school year.)

Developing relationships with law schools to harness law school student resources is still needed. In the past five years the youth court movement has benefitted from support from law students at the University of Pennsylvania, Widener, Villanova, and Penn State/Dickinson. More recently we are aware of interest at Temple and Drexel Law Schools. In addition we need a strategy to replicate the support Swarthmore College students have provided to the Chester youth courts. Pennsylvania has a vast higher education system which has great potential to reduce youth court costs. College and law students, working with leaders from the bench and bar, could develop youth court training networks to greatly reduce the costs needed to start a youth court. Other testimony you will receive in these hearings will address that issue.

A statewide youth court association is needed to provide training and administrative support to Pennsylvania’s youth courts. If local interest in youth courts can be harnessed that entity might initially serve the five county Philadelphia region before expanding to service the entire state.

Respectfully Submitted:

Gregory L. Volz, Esquire, M.S.
Stoneleigh Foundation Fellow
Youth Court City Council Hearing Testimony Outline:

Introduction:
Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to testify today regarding the Youth Court Program model. My name is Keith Bailey and I am the Director of Violence Prevention Initiatives for Philadelphia Physicians for Social Responsibility. I have had the pleasure to work with Youth Courts in Philadelphia dating back to the program’s initial implementation at Kensington High School in 1998. PSR is currently working with three Philadelphia High Schools to implement Youth Courts. These schools include: Kensington Culinary Arts High School, Lincoln High School, and Arise Academy Charter High School. As a testament to how much of a positive impact the Youth Court program has had, representatives from two of those schools are here testifying today.

History:
The Youth Court model’s introduction to Philadelphia was initially developed out of Norris Square Neighborhood Project, a small Kensington community non-profit that operated an AmeriCorps program. Kara Hanson, an AmeriCorps member and Georgetown Law grad partnered with Kensington High School, local justice agencies, and Communities In Schools to develop the pilot program. Kensington High School at the time had a drop-out rate of close to 30%, below 70% average daily attendance, and a high rate of suspensions (Source: PDE). The Youth Court model was developed to serve as an alternative to school suspension. The reality was, that for many students suspension no longer served as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior in school. Additionally, students were not being served by missing school and falling further behind academically. The Youth Court program was developed and implemented designed to serve as an alternative process for Level 1 violations of the school code of conduct. The Youth Court allowed students to hold their peers accountable for their actions, while offering the defendant an opportunity to tell their side of the story.

The initial pilot’s success led to the expansion of Youth Courts in South Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia High School during the 1st year of implementation. With the support of CIS, youth courts were implemented at 8 Philadelphia High Schools during the 1990’s-early 2000’s.
Youth Courts offer many benefits to schools, students who violate the code of conduct, as well as the young people participating in the program. There are a number of folks here today who will testify or have testified as to these benefits. I would like to focus on the benefits that I have seen for students who are engaged in the program.

Youth Courts offer young people an opportunity to have a voice in their school and to affect positive change in terms of school climate. Too often, as adults we determine what we think is the best course of action for a young person who has strayed from the path of success. As a result, young people will tune out adults. The Youth Court model is effective in that peers are holding each other accountable while also providing valuable insight and support to their fellow students. Youth engaged in the program develop strong critical thinking skills, public speaking skills, and become leaders and role models within their school community.

Youth Court also allows young people in inner city communities to develop positive mentoring relationships with professionals in the criminal justice system. Too often, our young adults’ only experience with the justice system is a negative one. They see family members or friends being arrested or on trial, they view the system as designed to oppress them. Youth Court and its partnership with local justice agencies allow young people to interact with professionals in the system in a positive manner, and they begin to develop a greater understanding of the criminal justice system and how it is designed to work.

Over the past fifteen years of working in Philadelphia with young people, I have seen members of Youth Courts across the city graduate at a higher rate than their peers, improve academic performance, and increase their school attendance. A former program participant who graduated in 2000 stated to me last year, that if not for the Youth Court program, she would have dropped out of school. This is a theme that I have seen many times over the years with this program model. I am proud to say that I maintain contact with many of my former program participants, and universally, they state that Youth Court was one of the best experiences of their high school years.

Thank you.
June 18, 2012

Written testimony provided by
Martin Nock
President & CEO, Communities In Schools of Philadelphia, Inc.
To the Philadelphia City Council

Good Afternoon Chairperson Darrell Clark and members of the Philadelphia City Council, thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony before you today. My name is Martin Nock and I am testifying as the President & CEO of Communities In Schools of Philadelphia. Communities In Schools of Philadelphia is an affiliate of Communities In Schools, Inc. (CIS), one of the largest dropout prevention and intervention program in the country. Founded in 1977, CIS affiliates operate in 27 states and the District of Columbia, serving 1.2 million elementary and secondary students in over 3,000 schools. CIS provides services to students in their schools, drawing primarily on existing community resources. CISP, a chartered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is in fact the largest of more than 200 independently incorporated affiliates of CIS. CIS of Philadelphia was created in 1986 and has steadily grown to provide service to 8,000 students annually in grades K through post high school as well as out of school youth.

In 1998, I met with Norris Square Neighborhood Project, Inc. to forge a partnership to collaborate and establish Teen Court programs in Philadelphia High Schools. Courtrooms were built in Kensington, South Philadelphia and West Philadelphia High Schools. During the 1999-2000 school year, four additional court rooms were built and programs were started at: Frankford, Simon Gratz, Benjamin Franklin and Strawberry Mansion High Schools. Strong principal leadership, flexible student rosters, teacher availability and CIS of Philadelphia financial and staff support allowed the program to thrive in the aforementioned high schools. Typically, the Teen Court class was reserved for junior and senior level students. Interested students were rostered into a class period and earned social studies or required elective credit by participating. In addition to the
specialized preparatory training, students also learned more about law through the Street Law curriculum.

In 2004, the School District of Philadelphia included Teen Court as an approved sanction for Level I offenses in their Code of Student Conduct handbook. Level I offenses, as determined by the School District of Philadelphia’s Code of Student Conduct include minor offenses such as class cutting, cursing and verbal arguments which are typically brought before the court. A typical sentence may include: community service, oral/written apologies, essays, jury service or restitution.

Although the program is structured as a courtroom based model, it is not designed to be traditionally adversarial. The atmosphere that is created within Teen Court is not based on a “good guy/bad guy” system. When a student comes before the court, their guilt has already been determined. The court hears the mitigating factors, which enable the jury to determine an appropriate sentence for the defendant. It is our belief that students who commit minor offenses are best served by remaining in school and fostering engagement with their school community. The Teen Court program affords students an option to suspension and helps them take responsibility for their own actions. Students are accountable to each other, which helps to create and support a positive school culture.

Over the past eleven years, the Teen Court Program has continued to operate in many of the original schools as we have evolved along with principal moves, roster variances and reduced funding. We have also seen that the Teen Court Program provides a structured forum that encourages youth to develop their leadership skills, follow the rules of law and hold their peers accountable for their anti-social behavior. The CIS of Philadelphia Teen Court programs have heard over 200 cases, and served over 150 students. CiSP is an active participant in Law Day, which we have transformed into Law Week. Law Week is an initiative designed to reach out to the community and engage students interested in the legal industry. In 2012 over 50 students heard Judges from the Municipal Court, speak about the law, and what career pathways are available to them. The University of Pennsylvania and Villanova Law School have been active
partners with CIS of Philadelphia’s Teen Court program through a mentoring program using law students that assist with hearing cases, preparing opening/closing arguments, defendant questioning and understanding the law.

We all know that a juvenile’s path towards serious delinquent behavior is usually precipitated by minor offenses and anti-social behaviors. Effective prevention programs are needed to address a youth’s initial anti-social actions and prevent the youth’s escalation into more harmful acts and destructive behavior. The Teen Court and Youth Court programs have proven to provide increased youth empowerment and alternatives to delinquency. Program participants are provided with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to be active and positive contributors to society. Teen Courts educate youth not only about court procedure, sentencing options and trial techniques but also about the structure of the juvenile and adult justice systems, the meaning of justice and the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Young people who are equipped with this knowledge are inclined to have a better understanding of their connection to the American system of justice and feel they are participants in it instead of potential victims. It is our hope that all students who participate in the Teen Court program, defendants and classroom participants will not fall victim to the nationwide drop out crisis. Thank you for your consideration of support for this initiative and the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the children in Philadelphia. I will be glad to answer any questions.
DHS TESTIMONY
BEFORE PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
REGARDING YOUTH COURTS

Resolution 120263

June 19, 2012

Good afternoon, Councilmembers Jones, Quinones Sanchez and members of the Committee. I am Anne Marie Ambrose, Commissioner of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, the largest county children and youth agency in the Commonwealth. As Commissioner of DHS, I am responsible for overseeing both our child protective services system as well as operating our Youth Study Center and Juvenile Justice Services Division. I am here today to testify on Resolution 120263 which was introduced by Councilmembers Jones and Quinones Sanchez.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony at this hearing examining how Youth Courts could reduce juvenile recidivism rates, violence in schools, and reduce the expense of incarceration by engaging and empowering previously disconnected youth in a participatory and democratic system. I strongly believe in the importance of Youth Courts from both a professional and personal standpoint.

Let me first speak about my personal experience. My personal involvement with youth courts spans some twenty years. As an attorney in the Public Defender Office in the 1990s, I served as a Mentor with the Youth Court program. As a Mentor, I met many remarkable young people who probably would have gone down the wrong path and whose lives almost certainly would have turned out differently if this positive program was not available. Having a youth be judged by his/her peers is extremely powerful: I saw firsthand the impact that this has on all parties involved. It gives the respondent the opportunity to avoid the juvenile court system and a second chance. On the other side, it teaches those hearing the case a better respect for the law and encourages academic success. I am proud to say that I am still in contact today with one of the teens that I met as a Youth Court Mentor. But in addition to my personal, positive experience with Youth Court, as the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, I am committed
professionally to supporting Youth Court as an effective alternative process that can reduce delinquency.

The Division of Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) at DHS is responsible for operating the county detention center, the Youth Study Center, developing the county’s budget for delinquency services, contracting with private providers for treatment services and receiving and disbursing funds used for delinquency services. JJS is always balancing its dual mandates of providing public safety and providing juveniles an opportunity for positive change.

JJS’s work is accomplished through collaboration with the Family Court, private service providers and other key juvenile justice stakeholders to identify service needs and gaps in services. This coordinated effort has resulted in a continuum of services that recognizes that juvenile delinquency is the result of a complex set of risk factors such as personal life, family circumstances, and the community environment.

Youth courts could play a key role in this continuum and can serve as a legitimate way of diverting children away from the formal juvenile justice system. Youth courts are intended to be an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system which begins with formal arrest and as an alternative to formal school disciplinary proceedings which often end in expulsion. Youth courts are designed to empower youth and communities to take an active role in addressing the early stages of youth delinquency. In addition, during these cost cutting times, Youth Courts can result in reduced costs per case compared to the traditional court-based justice system.

Youth courts have been in existence since the 1930’s around the country and for more than 30 years in Pennsylvania. During the past decade Youth Courts have become the country’s most replicated alternative to school discipline and juvenile justice programs. In 2011, the Pennsylvania Bar Association passed a unanimous resolution endorsing the American Bar Association’s efforts to promote Youth courts.

DHS strongly supports the core principles that are evident throughout the practices of youth courts, which are supported by the national body of literature on youth courts. One core principle is restorative justice. In order to encourage respondents to take responsibility for their actions and repair harm caused by their behavior, youth court proceedings and sanctions are focused on reintegrating respondents, encouraging them to play more positive roles in their communities, and exposing them to positive social peer influences.
Youth leadership is another core component of youth courts. Youth courts provide multiple opportunities for youth volunteers and parties to develop leadership skills and serve as peer leaders in their schools and communities through trainings, hearings, and community service activities.

Youth courts also provide a unique and valuable civic education opportunity for youth court volunteers and parties. Programs can demonstrate this value by developing and using evaluation tools that measure civic education gains in knowledge, experience, and perceptions of efficacy in community well-being.

Finally, youth courts can be an important cornerstone of a partnership between the legal system and the community, including schools, reducing crime and violence, creating safer homes, schools and neighborhoods, and restoring faith in the justice system.

We thank Councilmembers Jones and Quinones Sanchez for their leadership on this important issue. We value their commitment and partnership on all issues related to Philadelphia’s children and youth.

I will be happy to respond to questions at this time.
My name is George Mosee, and I am the Deputy District Attorney for the Juvenile Division in the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office. I am pleased to speak with you on behalf of the District Attorney about Youth Courts.

As an initial matter, I would like to point out that the term “Youth Courts” is quite broad and can mean different things to different people. In order to be precise and to focus on the type of initiative that I think would greatly enhance public safety, I will be using the term “School-Based Courts.”

School-Based Courts represent an excellent opportunity to improve safety and accountability in our schools and, ultimately, our neighborhoods. I envision a model where schools would have physical space for a courtroom-like setting in which non-criminal yet problematic activity could be resolved—issues like truancy, disciplinary issues, talking back to teachers, shoving, or taunting. Such a model would permit peer resolution in these instances of non-criminal misconduct.

It is important that these incidents of misconduct be resolved quickly and appropriately. If left unchecked, this kind of behavior negatively impacts the school’s normative culture and may escalate to criminal acts. Moreover, the victims of misconduct deserve to have justice and to have their matters addressed.

School-Based Courts permit such resolution by peers of the students involved in the incidents at issue. Students would be enlisted to serve as the prosecutor and jurors. They would be able to take control, with supervision, of the process and have a real stake in its outcome. They would learn about the role of the justice system and appreciate the system and its consequences. While they are mediating and resolving the disciplinary infractions, they will also be learning about civics first-hand. They will learn to appreciate jurisprudence not from books or a lecture, but through real-life experiences. And while doing all this, they will have resolved allegations of misconduct.

In the end, I believe that a robust system of these School-Based Courts will prevent crime. That is why we need such courts in our schools. The District Attorney is pledging the assistance of his office to help implement and sustain this program. Specifically, attorneys from our office will be able to provide training and technical assistance.

I am also aware that there are other Youth Courts that you are considering, Councilman Jones. Certainly, if we can find ways to support those very young adults who have already been through our juvenile system, then we should. I also support implementation of the curriculum that I helped develop in 2004, as part of the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia, for 6th, 7th and 8th graders. It would teach them about the justice system, jurisprudence, and the consequences of bad and otherwise criminal behavior.
As we work together, we must be sure we do not duplicate or contradict any of our existing youth diversionary programs. In particular, I wanted to highlight our Youth Aid Panels, which divert over 10% of our arrested youth. Presently we have 31 panels and 229 panelists, of which 86 had completed training as of the end of 2011. We had 739 total juvenile participants in 2011, with a 65% successful completion rate.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have or explain in more detail anything I have discussed today.
Racial Justice Initiative of TimeBanks USA

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL
June 19, 2012

Testimony of Dr. Edgar Cahn
Founder, Racial Justice Initiative of TimeBanks USA
Distinguished Professor of Law,
University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law

Personal history
My experience of youth courts goes back almost a half century. In 1962, I was assigned as staff to the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, which had been established by Attorney General Robert Kennedy. In that role, I learned of a youth court in Tompkins County, New York, which was authorized to impose up to fifty hours of constructive work - manual or academic for cases involving shop lifting, malicious mischief, drunkenness, driving without a license. It was immediately clear to me how powerful this model of young people’s involvement in prevention could be. I began to urge its implementation by the DC Superior Court in DC. That was in 1966.

I can say that the urging did not let up. But it took all of thirty years for the DC Superior Court to act on it. In 1996, a report had come out that 54% of all African-American males between the ages of 18-35 were either in prison, parole, probation or a warrant was out for their arrest. These were shocking statistics. I congratulated the Chief Judge for running a juvenile justice system that functioned as one of the nation’s most efficient pipelines into the adult prison system. When he asked how I would change the system, I shared my “breakthrough” discovery that “kids don’t listen to adults. Kids listen to kids. Why not enlist them in a peer-to-peer effort?” Out of that came the agreement authorizing the Time Dollar Institute to establish the Time Dollar Youth Court as an official diversion program of the D.C. Superior Court. (See Exhibit)

I speak today about youth courts from two perspectives
1. Youth Courts Work. The evaluations of the Youth Court in Washington DC, which I founded and formed, show that it has routinely reduced recidivism – significantly reduced it. That finding is mirrored by Youth Courts across the nation. Right here in Philadelphia, young people have the capacity to transform schools and neighborhoods, make equal opportunity a reality and make juvenile justice really mean justice for juveniles

2. Youth Courts can contribute to dismantling the Structural Racism that permeates juvenile justice and public education The Supreme Court has ruled in Washington v. Davis, 426 U.S. 229 (1976) that adverse racial disparities produced by a system will generate judicial relief only if one can prove that the disparity is intentional. Since proving intent is so difficult, the intent rule has proven an effective bar to relief. The Kellogg Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies funded the Racial Justice Initiative of TimeBanks USA, which put forward a novel approach to deal with the intent rule. The initiative’s approach is to provide officials with information about the results of present practice and alternatives that are cheaper, that reduce racial disparity and that are demonstrably effective. It effectively puts a choice on the table: “You can continue current approaches. Or change to these others.” Given formal notice of cheaper, validated alternatives, the intent requirement has been met if the system refuses to incorporate alternatives that work and are less expensive on a system wide basis. City of Canton v. Harris. 489 U.S. 378 (1989)

The Youth Court is one such alternative. It enlists youth and peer pressure to alter conduct, improve learning, generate civic engagement and reduce delinquency and truancy. Youth Courts provide an evidence-based, more effective and far less costly vehicle to reduce delinquency and school suspensions, and promote youth development.
The Youth Court in Washington, DC – An approach with genuine impact.
I urge the creation of a Youth Court or network of Youth Courts in Philadelphia. The experience in DC shows why. Prior to instituting the Youth Court as a diversion program in Washington DC, 40 percent of the cases referred to prosecutors in the District were "no papered." The cases were considered too trivial for overburdened prosecutors or police had failed to do all the paper work and secure the witnesses needed to proceed. So the word on the street was: "You get three freebies before they take anything you do seriously." And everyone knows that doesn't mean three illegal acts. It means three times getting caught. By the third arrest, a formal juvenile proceeding functions more as a rite of passage. For male teenagers, it is almost a macho ritual, a test of manhood, not a chance to choose a different path. Without meaning to, the juvenile justice system has been helping to teach young kids how they can beat the system.

The Youth Court of DC started as a small pilot program, then spread throughout Washington DC where hearings were held in public housing complexes, recreation centers, youth centers. Now the Youth Court is convened Saturday mornings at least twice a month at 500 Indiana Ave. NW, the courthouse of the Superior Court itself. I have seen that Youth Court grow from where it handled ten or twelve cases a month to where it handled roughly sixty five percent of non-violent first offenses by teenagers in the District.

Offenders are subject to numerous sentences: restitution, an apology (oral or written), writing an essay, community service, a Life Skills course, a boys' or girls' special program, a substance abuse program -- and perhaps, most frequently, seven weeks of jury duty. As a result, this is not good kids judging bad kids; it is former offenders dealing with young people who did what they did a few months ago. ²

Kids talking to kids works.
Prior to the Youth Court, recidivism for first time offenders ranged from 30-34%. With the Youth Court, recidivism has stayed below ten percent. That is typical of Youth Courts - but not all. A Study by the Urban Institute in 2002 found:
"In Alaska, six percent of the teen court youth were referred again to the Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice, compared with 23 percent of the non-teen court youth. In Missouri, 9 percent of the youth from the Independence Youth Court re-offended within six months, compared with 28 percent of similar youth handled by the Jackson County Family Court. In Arizona, the difference in recidivism between teen court youth and youth handled by the regular juvenile justice process also favored the teen court programs, but the size of the difference failed to reach statistical significance. Youth were re-referred to juvenile court in 9 percent of cases from the Tempe and Chandler teen courts, compared with 15 percent of the comparison groups cases handled by the juvenile court. ³

In Maryland, the teen recidivism rate was lower for the group who went through the regular juvenile justice system than for those who went through the teen court -- but that may be because the parents of the Maryland youth were older, owned their own homes, and were more likely to own computers and cellular phones.

The latest research on Youth Court states that there are currently more than 1250 youth courts located in 49 states and the District of Columbia. The national data finds that youth courts are serving approximately 110-125,000 youth offenders each year. Equally important, those youth courts provide hands-on leadership and citizenship training for more than 100,000 youth. In Washington DC and elsewhere, the youth court becomes an incubator for a new generation of youth spokespersons and leaders. They can speak with credibility and direct knowledge of the problems their peers face and the issues they confront trying to do the right thing. A goodly number have gone on to college and when they return to visit the DC Youth Court, they talk to groups of jurors about how youth court made a difference and what they are doing now.

² This last Saturday, June 16th, I watched youth jurors hearing a wide range of offenses:
  ▪ possession of marijuana  ▪ assault where a young man had hit back after being subjected to months of bullying for being gay and the school doing nothing  ▪ taking a bag of potato from a younger child  ▪ assault where a girl had struck her mother in an argument about use of a cell phone  ▪ uttering threatening words at a bus stop in front of a police officer when the bus driver had slammed the door in the students face and driven off leaving him to wait for the next bus
Youth Court Designs
Youth Courts can be fashioned so they "fit" local needs and enlist local allies. Students at the UDC School of Law have a community service requirement which many fulfill by serving at the Youth Court as Advocate Judges and Intake staff. In the State of Washington, I have just learned of an innovative Youth Traffic Court run by students at the University of Washington Law School to deal with driving without a license and driving by young people that results in an accident.

A grant to the Youth Court in Washington made possible one of the more exciting applications: youth who had some kind of problem at school (truancy, or suspension) were sentenced to tutor first and second graders in reading and math. It took nearly two years to get an elementary school to permit us to "bring in the hoods" as tutors -- but the parents of those elementary students raved about the program saying that the homework hour was the worst hour of the day for the -and that they could not keep their kids from going to school because they would be seeing their older buddy after school for tutoring. The teens who were sentenced to tutor changed when they became "educators" and the teachers at their high school stopped regarding them as trouble makers and suspensions-waiting-to-happen.

The cost varies greatly with staffing and design. All, however, cost substantially less than sending them through the official juvenile justice system. In 2006, the highly respected Washington State Institute for Public Policy undertook an extensive cost-benefit analysis of Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates. Their analysis found that every youth diverted to Youth Court rather than going through the traditional system would save the taxpayer $9,206 when costs were subtracted from predicable benefits to crime victims and to the taxpayer resulting from reductions in crime.

Adding to Philadelphia's existing efforts
I certainly don't want to assert that Youth Courts are the only way to lower recidivism rates. Philadelphia’s Youth Aid Panels do an exceptional job in enlisting the entire community to deal with juvenile offenders. And the new Philadelphia DMC Youth Law Enforcement Curriculum developed jointly by youth, the police, the District Attorney's office, the Defender Association, Juvenile Probation, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and law enforcement is another effective approach for lowering recidivism.

But the youth court can add to those efforts. This hearing offers a chance to take Philadelphia's effort to reduce racial disparity and advance community values to a new level. Youth Courts add two elements to the array of innovations you already have. They add peer pressure to the adult concern provided by Youth Aid Panels. And they develop citizenship and critical socialization skills.

The youth court experience changes lives
Youth court jurors are engaged in listening, problem solving and analysis and they do so in a role that confers real power and earns status. It enlists youth as the creators of a better, fairer justice system that teaches and incorporates the principles of restorative justice. The youth become change agents, community builders and justice activists. That's the kind of self-image we want our youth to have.

Statements by jurors have summed up some of the other effects of youth court. One respondent after being sentenced to jury duty told me: "I've been learning all the things I have to avoid that could have gotten me into trouble." I had not thought of Youth Court as providing that kind of case-by-case instruction in what not to do.

This past Saturday, one youth stopped me in the hall to tell me he would be going to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Then he added: "I owe that to Youth Court, both what I learned and how it kept my record clean. Without youth court, they never would have let me in, let alone given me the financial aid I got."

But perhaps the most powerful statement came when the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group of the District of Columbia (to which I had been appointed by the Mayor) asked a juror from the Youth Court what she had learned. She replied: "I learned my acts have consequences." I found myself wishing that some of our so-called leaders had learned that.
Superior Court
of the
District of Columbia

AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
AND
THE TIME DOLLAR INSTITUTE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A YOUTH COURT
DIVERSION PROGRAM

This Agreement is entered into between the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and the
Time Dollar Institute in partnership for the purpose of jointly developing a diversion program which
provides a meaningful alternative to the traditional adjudicatory format in juvenile cases.

The National Institute of Justice awarded a grant to the Time Dollar Institute to undertake the
planning and conduct of a Time Dollar Youth Court.

The Time Dollar Institute having received this grant has agreed to assume full responsibility for
the daily operations and management of the Youth Court program. The Time Dollar Institute has
further committed its own resources to the success of the program.

The Youth Court shall be conducted at the District of Columbia School of Law and shall serve
as a unique pre-petition diversion program for nonviolent, first-time offenders. The Program will foster
accountability, mobilize peer pressure to reduce delinquency and recidivism, promote responsibility to
the community and victims of delinquent acts, and assist in the development of self-esteem and respect
for the rule of law in the District of Columbia. These are the objectives of the Youth Court, and it is
with the attainment of these goals as our mutual mission that the Superior Court of the District of
Columbia and the Time Dollar Institute enter into this Agreement to implement the Youth Court
Diversion Program.

[Signatures]
Notable Eugene Hamilton
Chief Judge
Superior Court of the
District of Columbia

[Signatures]
Edgar S. Cahn
President
Time Dollar Institute

[Signatures]
Véronique B. Raymond, Esq.
Executive Officer
District of Columbia Courts

Date: April 22, 1996
Committee on Public Safety  
Philadelphia City Council  
City Hall  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

June 18, 2012

To the Committee Members:

Thank you for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify. I am Cathy Weiss, the Executive Director of the Stoneleigh Foundation. The Stoneleigh Foundation is based in Philadelphia and exists to improve life outcomes for children involved, or at risk of involvement, in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. We believe in the power of the individual to effect social change and so we invest in people not programs. We meet our mission through fellowship awards that support accomplished individuals working to improve these systems through research, policy change, or practice improvement.

Within this context, Stoneleigh has been interested in advancing the use of Youth Courts in school settings since 2009, when we invited Gregg Volz to be a foundation fellow. We see the potential Youth Courts hold for providing much more than just an alternative disciplinary process. In fact, this child-centered model builds social skills and pulls community into the schools in ways that recognizes the collective obligation for ensuring our children’s safety and well-being.

Very little research on Youth Courts had been undertaken when Gregg first approached Stoneleigh. However, the idea to create a movement for an alternative to the harmful zero tolerance policies that prevail in Pennsylvania school discipline practice was compelling. We couldn’t understand why states like Arizona, Illinois, Florida and New York had widely adopted the model and Pennsylvania simply hadn’t. It seemed entirely illogical that the outcomes we all desire: high school graduation, civic participation, and personal responsibility were ever going to be achieved by the prevailing disciplinary policies that disengage young people from the very system that is designed to prepare them for a successful adulthood. We saw that building the awareness and the movement for Youth Courts presented an opportunity to improve outcomes for our children who were otherwise being put into the school to prison pipeline at alarming rates.

For the past four years, we have had the privilege to be an active partner with Gregg and his passion for Youth Courts. Building from his base in Chester City, Gregg has begun to change the culture and climate in schools that are at best no
different from those in the SDP. Working with assorted leadership teams, Gregg has been able
to embed Youth Courts into the school disciplinary process. Rather than an add on, this has
become an integral part of the discipline options.

During numerous visits to the courts, I have witnessed youngsters, who are clearly troubled and
have faced multiple school disciplinary actions (many of these suspensions of one sort or
another), emerge from a truly broken and underfunded school district with poise, respect, and
empathy. They not only take personal responsibility, but also become a judge of their peers.
Youth Courts give children who have never seen the justice system work for them or their
family and friends, a chance to see how it can be a positive force. It provides the chance for
children who have always been labeled bad or troublemakers the opportunity, skills and
responsibility to sit in judgment of others. And most important, youth courts provided a reason
(often the only one students cite) to come to school.

Additionally, we have seen how Youth Courts bring community into the schools: lawyers who
teach children how to run a court; university students who volunteer to help run the program;
and, judges who have embraced this model and offered summer internships to some of the
participants. These community connections not only enrich the school, but begins to cultivate
the relationships that our children need outside of school.

To be sure, there is no creaming in CUSD or Youth Courts. If you are in a CUSD school, it is
because you really have no options. Yet, even in this most challenging of years, the
administration, the teachers and the students themselves have worked to maintain Youth Courts
and participate in the research study that Research for Action is undertaking on behalf of
Stoneleigh. When there was no promise of a paycheck or a school being open in a month, they
believed in the power of the Youth Courts and somehow kept them alive. To me this speaks
volumes about what the power of this model holds for Philadelphia.

As I stated at the beginning of this testimony, Stoneleigh does not provide program or direct
service support; however, we believe that philanthropy is an important ally in this community’s
effort to ensure that our children have the opportunity to learn in healthy environments that
value their voice. Towards this end, we have recently approved a new fellowship that will
support the SRC’s development of a school safety and climate strategy. The Stoneleigh board
believes strongly that during these challenging and fiscally constrained times, that providing a
high quality individual who has the objectivity and time to singly focus on this critical area of
need is a role that represents our willing attitude.

Yet, it isn’t just dollars that we bring to the effort. We understand that with tight budgets,
government can’t do the type of research and brainstorming that we have the luxury and
obligation, to perform. We understand that the role of philanthropy is different from
government, service providers, and the business community. By our very design, foundations
are afforded the opportunity to take risks that other sectors can’t. In return, I believe we owe it
to our community to share what we learn and work with policy-makers to promote best practice
application here.

Too often in Philadelphia we don’t share information and work in ways that build on the
strengths of multiple stakeholders: we don’t set a table for thoughtful dialogue and diverse perspectives. And in avoiding this forum, we reinforce the silos that prevent us from even speaking the same language. Stoneleigh works hard to partner with those in the community who want to improve outcomes for our vulnerable children. We convene, share learning, and advance best practice. In closing I want to leave you with a story that reflects the choice that we as a community have before us today.

Last week, I was informed about a sophomore honors student at a Philadelphia high school who was handcuffed and thrown into jail for eight hours. This young woman, who didn’t have a single infraction on her record and was attending a job fair at her school, was carrying a canister of pepper spray. Her mother had given this to her for safety during the winter when she had to come home from school alone, in the dark.

What is the sense or logic behind policies that mandate handcuffing and putting this young woman in a jail cell? Who among us thinks that a child, who is already living with a fear that prevented her from freely walking home, would become an even better student and feel connected to school by this response? Why did none of the adults with authority simply ask this honors student with no history of trouble why she had pepper spray?

Ladies and gentlemen, if there was a Youth Court at this high school, this would have been the first question she would have been asked. Rather than traumatized and angered, the young woman would have been heard and her full academic performance would have been considered. Yes, she would have been given discipline for violating the code of conduct, but I am certain her peers would have treated her with the dignity and understanding that her offense warranted. And, instead of learning the lesson of zero tolerance, she would have learned the lesson of fairness and justice.

Philadelphia doesn’t like change, but today, I ask those of you who have been here a long time and missed other opportunities, to show our children you care. The choice is yours.

Sincerely,

Cathy M. Weiss

Cathy M. Weiss
Executive Director
TEEN COURT: EXPLORING TRUANCY AND VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS

The School District of Philadelphia is committed to being proactive and preventive in our efforts to reduce truancy and incidents of bullying and violence in our schools. Teen Court (also known as Youth or Peer Court) is considered one of the fastest growing juvenile prevention and intervention programs in the United States. It is designed as an alternative to juvenile justice and operates as a diversion to juvenile delinquency. When implemented in schools, the model is best utilized to address truancy and level-one (1) violations of The School District of Philadelphia’s Code of Student Conduct.

Teen Court is not new to the District. Beginning in 1998, the first structured implementation began with a partnership between the District, Communities In Schools of Philadelphia, Inc., and Temple University. At that time, Teen Court was implemented in three high schools: Frankford, South Philadelphia, and Strawberry Mansion. The model was implemented with the guidance, financial support, and in-kind contributions of an Advisory Board. The Board was comprised of staff from Adult Probation and Parole, the Defender’s Association, the Department of Human Services, the District Attorney’s Office, Juvenile Probation, Philadelphia Police Department, U.S. Attorney’s Office, and private law practices. Teen Court operated to not only provide sanctions for youth offenders, but also to educate students on civic responsibility. The mission of the program was to provide a service-learning forum for students that would develop their leadership skills, as well as hold students accountable for following school rules and exhibiting appropriate behavior. The program goals were as follows:

1. To prevent youth who commit minor school offenses from becoming involved in more serious infractions;
2. To hold youth accountable through the use of positive and restorative approaches to reform. Typical “sentences” would include community service, oral or written apologies, essays, and restitution;
3. To reduce the number of school/class cuts, lateness, absences, and suspensions;
4. To educate participating youth about the judicial process; and
5. To increase students’ skills in public speaking, conflict resolution, and critical thinking.

Teen Courts was a program for youth, run by youth. Not only were students trained to participate in the roles of judges, jurors, prosecuting and defense attorneys, clerks, bailiffs, and warrant officers, but they were also trained to be peer leaders in their school and in their community.

This kind of program has great potential, not just for behavioral, social/emotional learning, and service learning, but for academic enrichment in its teaching of critical thinking and urgent problem-solving for young people. In its use of the many legal professionals as tutors and guides, Youth Court also hits the gold standard for educational enrichment: busy, important adults taking time out to care for and instruct young people. The School District of Philadelphia believes in the value of Teen Court and welcomes further discussion with members of City Council and our stakeholders on the potential revitalization of this program.
Good afternoon everyone, my name is John Dao and I am the current Chairman of the Philadelphia Youth Commission. The Philadelphia Youth Commission began service in 2008 with the purpose of representing Philadelphia’s youth in public hearings and providing testimony that reflects the youth perspective. We work with the City, non-profits, community organizations, and private entities to develop strategies to improve the lives of Philadelphia’s youth. We hope that the testimony we provide here today will shed light on the thoughts and concerns of the more than 300,000 young people we represent. I would like to thank the distinguished members of City Council for allowing me to testify on behalf of the PYC.

The Youth Commission was founded under the basic principal that there should be “No Decision About Me, Without Me;” a principle that recognizes that regardless of age or income, young people should always have a say in the issues that are impacting their generation…my generation. This is why it’s important to not only have young people be a part of the brainstorming process but also the decision making one as well.

As many of us are aware, young people are one of the fastest growing populations of both victims and perpetrators of crimes. This in many ways lays the foundation for many of the problems we face today. School to prison pipe-line, decreasing gradations rate, increase in drop-out rates and the ever growing process of creating criminals instead of doctors, teachers, community leaders, engineers and even city council members.

With this in mind, the PYC wholeheartedly supports Resolution No.120263, authorizing City Council’s Committee on Public Safety to conduct hearings on the benefits of Youth Courts. We believe that youth courts provide a unique opportunity for positive alternative sanctions by providing a peer-driven sentencing mechanism that allows young people to not only take responsibility but to also be held accountable by a body of their peers. We anticipate that this will instill a greater sense of respect and legitimacy to the process.

Additionally, the PYC believes that youth courts will provide meaningful experiences for young people in Philadelphia. Youth who take on responsibility in these courts will gain a broader insight on the law and its application. They can develop their analytical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills. It will prepare them with skills that will lead them to succeed as informed citizens of this great commonwealth.
In conclusion, the PYC urges City Council to adopt Resolution No. 120263 because it will open dialogue on a program that can improve the lives of all youth in Philadelphia.
TESTIMONY BEFORE PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL
CONCERNING YOUTH COURTS

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about youth courts. I am Thomas G. Wilkinson Jr., president of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the state’s largest bar association representing 28,000 lawyers.

Youth court, teen court, and peer court are interchangeable terms for an alternative disciplinary system for youth who have committed an act that violates the norms of a school or the community. Youth courts have been a focus of the Pennsylvania Bar Association since our 2007 Children's Summit at which an overview of Pennsylvania's efforts to build and sustain this model alternative justice approach was presented.

Some youth courts process school offenses; others process juvenile offenses in the justice system. The most appealing model combines school and community justice youth courts. In this model, the school provides the training and early experience using school discipline referrals and veterans of these school-based youth court programs then move on to work in the juvenile justice system youth courts on
referrals from the juvenile justice system. Youth courts train teenagers to serve as jurors, judges and attorneys, handling real-life cases involving their peers.

The goal of youth court is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the school or larger community and receive the help and guidance they need to avoid further involvement in the school discipline or juvenile justice system. Youth courts hear a range of low-level offenses; many handle cases that would otherwise wind up in Family Court or would result in school suspensions.

Youth courts can be effective in reducing recidivism among respondents in both school and community justice settings and in reducing delinquency among the youth court members operating the court. All young people involved, whether respondents or court members, learn citizenship, academic and socialization skills. Youth courts provide these benefits even for younger students.

The PBA Board of Governors unanimously passed a resolution of the former PBA Child Advocate Pro Bono Committee supporting youth courts on May 4, 2011, and that resolution was approved by the PBA House of Delegates on May 6, 2011. The resolution called for the Pennsylvania Bar Association to:
1) Support the American Bar Association’s efforts promoting youth courts;

2) Organize and convene before the end of the 2011 calendar year a statewide Youth Court Advisory Board made up of the various youth court stakeholders, including but not limited to judges, lawyers, elected representatives, police and probation officers, educators, students, faith based and philanthropic leaders and others from the law, justice and education communities, including parents;

3) Build on the call to the PBA of the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice Report to develop programs that bridged civic education and juvenile justice by promoting a system of both school based and community/juvenile justice- based youth courts across the commonwealth that would expand on the conflict resolution, anti-bullying and law-related education model of the PBA’s Project PEACE; and

4) Support legislative efforts advancing youth courts as well as the public/private partnership to expand and improve the sustainability of youth courts across Pennsylvania.

The PBA has worked in partnership with the PennCORD civic outreach efforts of Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge and former Pennsylvania First Lady Midge Rendell to promote civics education and youth courts. That joint history with youth courts includes a 2008 Law Day presentation made by Judge Rendell and
past PBA President Andrew Susko to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges highlighting youth court programs in Chester city.

PBA leadership has highlighted this youth court initiative at statewide programs and is committed to supporting efforts to fulfill the mandate of the youth court resolution. Youth court was featured in the 2011 and 2012 annual spring statewide pro bono conference, in a series of ten Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) Board supported programs across the state featuring the Montgomery Child Advocate Program last year, at an October 2011 program in Lehigh County and in last November’s PBA Children’s Rights Committee seminar.

Youth court was again featured at the March 2012 Sparer Symposium at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Youth court has been the focus of the Allegheny County Bar Association’s most recent bar leadership class, which is working with the Allegheny Court of Common Pleas to implement a juvenile justice based youth court program in Pittsburgh.

There was considerable youth court activity in Philadelphia during the 2011-12 academic year with new courts being established under the auspices of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Communities in School and the Philadelphia Bar
Association’s Accelerating Civic Education (ACE) outreach effort. The Pennsylvania Bar Association has discussed with current Philadelphia Bar Chancellor John Savoth an expansion of youth court efforts through the local bar association.

The Pennsylvania Bar Foundation provided seed money in 2011 through its Birdsell Grant Program for youth court programs in Delaware and York counties. The Delaware County effort has been particularly robust, in large measure due to Stoneleigh support over the past three and a half years of attorney Gregg Volz who has developed and implemented a series of youth courts in the Chester city public schools after first connecting with the PBA Pro Bono Office prior to the 2007 Children's Summit.

A team of Delaware County lawyers, supported by Delco Bar Executive Director Bill Baldwin and the PBA Pro Bono Office, worked with Volz to develop and present a two-part, five-hour Youth Court CLE program. The first program, held last October, was a general outreach to the entire Bar about youth courts and that was followed by a November advanced training for lawyer volunteers who then worked in the Chester schools with the youth courts during the remainder of the 2011-12 academic year.
Funding for youth court remains a significant issue. Despite significant two-year youth court grants received in 2011 by agencies in York and Chester counties through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, cutbacks in funding for schools and alternative justice programs have combined with the tough economic climate to make youth court funding problematic despite significant suggested savings from costs associated with the youth disengagement that youth court combats.

The Stoneleigh Foundation stands out as a major player in the field and its continued support of youth courts is evident in its funding of a research study to collect the data needed to show the efficacy of youth courts. This research should help in efforts to secure further funding from other sources.

A youth court association needs to be created to ensure youth court expertise is available to local juvenile authorities and school administrators who wish to develop youth courts as an alternative disciplinary program. Public schools need training assistance and support for the courts to be sustainable. The example of what happened in Philadelphia twelve years ago when a series of teen courts established under the auspices of Temple University School of Law and various
partners withered away after dedicated funding was exhausted is evidence that a supporting structure is needed to sustain youth courts. Such an organization should reflect the public/private partnership called for by our PBA Resolution.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association’s Legislative Department has worked with various players in the youth court field to draft legislation for consideration by the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The youth court bill was drafted based upon a review of every youth court statute in America.

The proposed bill called for a public-private partnership to support youth courts and for the establishment of quality standards for all Pennsylvania youth courts. The legislative language we have developed could be useful in drafting an ordinance for the City of Philadelphia establishing standards for school-based and juvenile justice based youth courts in Philadelphia, and we would be happy to share it with you. The Pennsylvania Bar Association also maintains a youth court information site at: http://www.pabar.org/youthcourts.asp

In conclusion, we want to stress that youth courts do more than provide an alternative discipline procedure. They also provide an extension and application of learning about constructive dispute resolution for the students involved in the day-
to-day operation of the courts. Youth courts appeal to students because they process real student disciplinary cases that allow the students to participate and contribute to an improved climate. Youth courts not only can enhance the performance of the juvenile justice system, they also have enormous potential to educate youth about the justice system and develop academic, citizenship and socialization tools.

Submitted June 19, 2012

Thomas G. Wilkinson, Jr.
President, Pennsylvania Bar Association
June 18, 2012

City of Philadelphia
City Council
Public Safety Committee
Attn: Shoshana Bricklin

Dear Members of the Committee:

The National Association of Youth Courts (NAYC) is honored to provide this statement in the form of written testimony to express our support for the initiatives undertaken by leaders in the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania whose mission is the development of youth courts in your diverse and vital communities.

We at NAYC serve as a central point of contact for youth court programs across the nation, delivering training and technical assistance, and developing resource materials on how to enhance the operations of some 1,050 youth court programs in the United States and to help initiate programs where they do not yet exist.

NAYC is affiliated with state-based associations and community-based programs which serve youth who benefit from early diversion and alternative sanctions as a result of chronic truancy, delinquent actions or other first time and minor offenses.

Youth court programs strive to nurture in youth a respect for the rule of law, help develop positive citizenship attitudes, encourage civic engagement, and promote educational success through a diversity of service learning opportunities, strategies and activities.

Youth courts are structured to provide cost-effective, positive alternative sanctions for first-time offenders by establishing a peer-driven sentencing mechanism that allows young people to take responsibility, to be held accountable, and to make restitution. Positive peer pressure is used in youth courts to exert influence over adolescent behavior.

Youth courts alternative sentencing results in reduced costs per case as compared to the traditional justice system and result in reduced recidivism rates. Expanding youth courts is an effective strategy for reducing juvenile delinquency, allowing young people to take responsibility for their actions in benefit to their communities and to learn community engagement skills.
In addition to imposing constructive sanctions for juvenile offenders, youth courts also offer a powerful set of civic opportunities for youth in the community. Youth volunteers actively learn the roles and responsibilities of the various parts of the judicial system. They act as law enforcement professionals, prosecuting and defense attorneys, clerks, bailiffs, jurors and even judges to gain experiential knowledge of the juvenile justice system. The youth respondents and volunteers acquire valuable understanding about police and probation officers, youth services workers, and court administration, paving a path for academic and career building opportunities.

Youth courts are predicated on their sensitivity to unique needs and the diversity of the people they serve - youth, families and community partners. Relationships with existing civic, educational, law enforcement, courts and faith sector organizations currently provide the prime outreach strategies for recruitment of youth court participants and community volunteers.

As communities through our nation move forthrightly to establish investments in youth courts, we at NAYC seek to develop strategic partnerships to improve their sustainability. As a result of these strategic partnerships, the nation’s youth courts will further bolster the public safety, educational and economic futures of young people as well as promote the ideals of lifelong civic involvement.

We at NAYC are very much looking forward to hearing about the results of your deliberations, and pledge to provide whatever assistance possible as the City of Philadelphia and your youth development leaders move forward in service to our next generation of responsible citizens.

Sincerely,

Jack Levine
Program Director

This written testimony is offered on behalf of the Board of Trustees, National Association of Youth Courts, Hon. J. Richard Couzens, President.

NAYC grants permission for this document to be shared and included in any public record generated by the proceeding of the City of Philadelphia City Council.
Councilman Jones and Members of the Public Safety Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this important issue. At the Philadelphia Youth Network, we are committed to promoting creative solutions that enable young people to find their rightful places as full and contributing citizens. As such, we appreciate the work of Councilman Jones and Committee Members, and thank you for your commitments to improving outcomes for our leaders of the tomorrow.

The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) is a 13 year-old youth intermediary organization dedicated to increasing economic opportunity for young Philadelphians by developing high-quality program models that promote acquisition of academic and 21st century skills. Under contract to the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, PYN staffs and leads the mayoral-appointed Council for College and Career Success, which serves as the City’s Workforce Investment Act Youth Council, and also manages more than $30 million in government, foundation and employer investments dedicated to a variety of activities that promote career preparation and success. In addition, PYN helps to lead citywide campaigns that coordinate and expand youth employment opportunities (WorkReady Philadelphia) and that build public will to resolve the City’s dropout crisis (Project U-Turn).

Research conducted through Project U-Turn in 2005 and 2006 underscores the educational challenges faced by young Philadelphians who become involved in the juvenile justice system. In fact, Neild and Balfanz (2006) found that fully 90% of students who had a delinquent placement during their high school years ultimately dropped out. Subsequent analyses by Project U-Turn found that the misalignment in
academic and CTE skills and programming between delinquent placement facilities and youthful offenders’ home schools could be an important contributing factor to these high dropout rates, and that these young people often faced social and emotional challenges upon re-entering their communities.

The lack of a high school diploma has substantial negative economic impacts for youthful offenders and other under-educated Philadelphians. Studies by Fogg et. al. (2008) showed that dropouts in Philadelphia earn only about 50% of the income of high school graduates over a working lifetime, and only about 25% of what college degree-holders make. Furthermore, the costs of high school dropout for the broader society are extraordinarily high. For example, for every Philadelphia high school dropout we can convert to a graduate, the economic benefit to government and taxpayers – in terms of increased tax revenue and reduced costs of social services and other transfer payments – is more than $580,000 (Harrington et. al. 2009). So, clearly it is all of our best interests to improve high school graduation rates and to encourage additional education for all of our citizens.

PYN manages five neighborhood-based youth centers for out-of-school youth and young adults returning to their communities from delinquent placement. Based on this experience, we have an appreciation not only for the challenges these young people face, but also for the importance of supportive systems and approaches – including those that offer alternatives to traditional court involvement and that seek to keep young people out of the system in the first place.

Based on a brief review of literature, it appears that Youth Courts have the potential to successfully address the circumstances of first-time offenders in ways that keep them out of formal juvenile court settings and might also help to reduce recidivism. One of the foundational research studies relating to youth courts is The Impact of Teen Court on Youthful Offenders (Butts, Buck and Coggeshall; 2002), published by the Urban Institute with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This study evaluated sites in four states across the country, finding that in two of the four areas studied youth court participants had significantly lower recidivism rates than the comparison groups. At a third site, the trends also favored youth courts, but not by statistically significant margins. In short, the study concludes that “teen court may be preferable to the regular juvenile justice process in jurisdictions that do not, or cannot, provide meaningful sanctions for all young, first-time juvenile offenders.” The report also cites several perspectives on why the youth court experience might reduce recidivism, including the impact of peer justice, the sense of restorative justice and repentance, law-related education and skill building.
From a youth development perspective, youth courts might well have other positive aspects. For example, Schneider (2008) notes that, as youthful offenders encounter their non-offender peers in a positive setting, it is possible that “significant other” relationships might develop that could provide positive peer pressure and encourage socially-responsible behavior. Furthermore, youth who serve as judges, jurors and/or other functions relating to the court also benefit from learning the values and traditions of the justice system, taking on important responsibilities, and seeing themselves in new roles that demand higher levels of skills and decision-making than they have experienced previously.

Finally, given the stresses on public sector budgets, the relatively smaller financial cost of the youth court model is another important factor for consideration. According to Schneider, if the assumptions about lower recidivism rates are valid, then “the average youth court carries out its mission at about a quarter of the cost of a traditional court.” Such savings are typically accomplished due to the largely volunteer nature of the youth court, and its reliance on young people, themselves, who often play the roles typically managed by professionals in traditional court settings. Furthermore, the youth courts’ use of community service in lieu of incarceration also appears to reduce overall costs to the juvenile justice system.

In addition to these national studies, Klein and Volz (2011) produced a summary document that identifies community-based youth courts in eight areas of the Commonwealth, including both urban and rural settings, and school-based youth courts in four urban areas, including Philadelphia. Furthermore, according to a summary document prepared by Communities in Schools of Philadelphia, four school-based youth courts currently operate in Philadelphia, including sites at Frankford High School, Overbrook High School, South Philadelphia High School and Strawberry Mansion High School. I understand that representatives of the Stoneleigh Foundation and Communities and Schools of Philadelphia are presenting testimony to the Committee, which I am sure will provide additional details on youth courts operating in Philadelphia and around the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, I believe that Council’s attention to the youth court approach in Philadelphia is warranted and well-founded, and I applaud Councilman Jones and the Committee for addressing this issue. Moving forward, those of us at Philadelphia Youth Network are eager to support the work of the Council in promoting new opportunities for young people, and we look forward working closely with you to increase outcomes for some of our most vulnerable youth and young adults.
June 11, 2012

Dear Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council,

My name is Carole Haas Gravagno and I chair the Board of the Stoneleigh Foundation which focuses on child welfare and juvenile justice issues. We award fellowships to individuals whose work shows potential for solutions to improve the performance of those systems in the form of better outcomes for vulnerable children. We have found that these solutions often cross current boundaries of systems and agencies, boundaries which themselves are often barriers to effectively helping our children.

Stoneleigh has invested in youth court development for the past 3 ½ years. We believe youth courts can provide students, schools and our neighborhoods a positive, effective means of ensuring our young people grow up to be productive and contributing members of society. We are particularly interested in the paradigm shift that youth courts present by encouraging youth to actively participate and become the major resource for systems reform.

I have personally observed youth court hearings and been impressed by the serious and thoughtful way the students conduct themselves and find ways to help offending students avoid repeating their misconduct. I suggest the entire membership of the Philadelphia City Council observe a youth court hearing and witness their dynamic and transformative power.

I am aware of growing interest in youth courts within the law firms of our city, within the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the ranks of teachers and school officials, and within philanthropy. I intend to contribute my energies in the future to ensuring that the momentum for youth courts continues. I will encourage others to contribute their energy and resources to that same end.

Therefore, I urge the Philadelphia City Council to join us in developing a public-private partnership in our city to create a strong,
sustainable network of youth courts in both schools and neighborhoods. If asked I would be pleased to work with you to help find the needed resources to develop an organization capable of helping juvenile justice and school districts develop youth courts, to create and sustain this network, and ensure that our youth courts are high quality and state of the art. The private sector has led this effort to date and we are committed to working with the public sector to advance the youth court movement.

Thank you for allowing me to contribute to this important discussion.

Sincerely,

Carole Haas Gravagno

CHG/ed

Sent Via: shohan.bricklin@phila.gov
This is testimony submitted by Leigh Dalton, Esq., Director of the York County Truancy Prevention Initiative and York County Youth Court Alliance to Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council.

The Problem:

York County has approximately 400,000 residents; in York City there are approximately 40,000 residents in five square miles. Per capita income of York City families is $13,439. Nearly, 69% of the population has a high school diploma and 10% has a Bachelor’s degree. A third of the population is under age 18.

York City is experiencing an increase in the number of gangs, with 35 gangs identified. York City School District (YCSD) has an enrollment of 7,624, with 1,343 enrolled in the one high school. The median household income is $26,475 and 87% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Special education services are received by 25% of students. YCSD is 43% African-American, 37% Hispanic and 18% Caucasian. In addition, 24% of the students are English Language Learners. Approximately 40 students are pregnant or parenting.

William Penn High School did not make Annual Yearly Progress, a required standardized testing under the No Child Left Behind Act, and is at the “Corrective Action II Year 4” level, meaning the state could assume administration. In 2008–2009, 66% of 11th graders scored basic or below (on a scale of Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic) on the state NCLB reading test and 75% on the math test. YCSD’s graduation rate is 36% and the truancy rate is 34%. From 1998–2008 1,411 students dropped out of YCSD. Of the 254 students who graduated in 2008, 58 or 23% planned to attend a two or four year college. In 2006-2007, 34 incidents at the school required law enforcement involvement. The School Safety Annual Report for 2006-2007 indicates that 17,669 violations of the student code of conduct and 7,449 acts of violence resulting in out of school suspensions; and 39 incidents lead to expulsions.

During the 2008-2009 school year, roughly 155,000 or 8.6% of Pennsylvania students in grades K-12 had six or more unexcused absences. During the 2008-2009 school year, 20% of York County’s ninth graders were habitually truant. We focused our first Youth Court Alliance in York City because in the 2008-2009 school year 34.2% of the students were truant; the next highest truancy rate in York County was in a school district with an 8.3% truancy rate. The total number of unlawful days in York City in 2008-2009 was 32,916, and 3,576 citations were filed for truancy in York City School District in 2008-2009.

There is a strong correlation between truancy, dropping out of school, and incarceration. Students who drop out of school are eight times as likely to be in prison. In York County, 95% of juvenile offenders were habitual truants; 80% of the prison population were habitual truants. Specifically, 41% of inmates in York County prison do not have a high school diploma. The cost to incarcerate a York County resident is approximately three times the cost to educate them: $23,123 versus $7,835. Currently, the county spends $27.3 million annually on juvenile delinquency and dependency placements. The cost for one year of juvenile and adult correctional costs is approximately $42 million.

In 2009 there were 1,703 Juvenile Court dispositions in York County, which is 3.8% of the York County juvenile population. Four of the 1,703 dispositions were transferred to criminal proceedings and in 632 of the cases, fines and or costs were ordered. One point six percent of these 1,703 dispositions were handed to youth twelve years of age; 6.8% were given to youth only thirteen years of age; over 10% of these youth were only fourteen years of age, 16.6% were fifteen, and 22.6% were sixteen – all within the age range for compulsory attendance. Of these 1,703 youth handed delinquency dispositions, 352 of them had not completed the ninth grade; 248 had only gone as far as completing the ninth grade; and only 144 had completed the tenth grade. Basically only 77 of these youth had completed the twelfth grade. Seven hundred fifty of these youth did not report their age, which means there is room for any one of these numbers to be higher.
The Process of finding a Solution:

In 2010 the York County Truancy Prevention Initiative (“YCTPI”) held a York County Truancy Summit at which stakeholders and partners hosted an evening event presenting information on truancy and offering attendees the opportunity to help shape the solutions. Students met with each other to discuss lessons learned. Parents, teachers, school administrators, judges, attorneys, business leaders, service providers, agency representatives, non-profit members, and community members either discussed Pennsylvania’s truancy laws, concerns around data collection, workforce development, or kindergarten and first grade attendance policies. After a dinner during which participants heard from a Youth Leadership Panel, the over 250 Summit attendees had the choice of brainstorming alternatives to fines, examining ways to reduce the gaps and barriers to collaboration, or participating in a focus group.

The need to focus on truancy, as an early intervention, was clear. The necessity of placing the first youth court in York City was also apparent. Because the Truancy Summit Youth Panel indicated that their hardest year was the transition from middle school into high school, ninth-grade truancy status offenses at William Penn Senior High School in York City were eligible for referral to the first York County Youth Court Alliance in its first year.

York County Youth Court Alliance:

Youth Court Alliance is an alternative to going to court for truant ninth grade students. Students' parents/guardians have the option of choosing Youth Court Alliance over a citation to the Magisterial District Court. The parent/guardian and the student participate in a court-simulated procedure to address the issues causing truancy. The courtroom procedure is run by trained high school students. The role of the students consists of coming up with consequences that would allow the truant student to take responsibility for his or her actions. The consequences always include jury duty, and may include community service, research projects, oral/written apologies, essays, or personal development. Magisterial District Judge Ronald Haskell graciously provided the use of his courtroom each Wednesday so that the process had an increased level of decorum.

The first year was not easy, but it has been successful over all. Originally the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) funded the Youth Court Alliance $62,000 over two years. With all recipients of the PCCD Diversion Grant experiencing implementation issues, the grant has been extended to a third year. Same amount of money, but we served only half of our intended population in the first year, so the funds will be available for a third year of operation.

In its first year, five York County Bar Association attorneys volunteered their time to train eighteen youth who ran the Youth Court Alliance (Members). Using models such as the Chester High School Youth Court in Delaware County, YCTPI partnered with York County Bar Association members to design curriculum and provide training. These attorneys also oversaw the court each Wednesday afternoon. Hearings began in November 2011 with some glitches; by March 2012 they were running successfully and steadily.

The Youth Court Alliance relies on partnerships with York County Bar Association, School District of the City of York, Magisterial District Judges, Penn State Dickinson School of Law, Children’s Home of York’s Strengthening Families Program, York County Family Group Decision Making, Family-Child Resources, Inc.

With only one year of operation, we have only baseline data. Preliminary baseline data indicates that 26 of the 38 students served successfully completed their disposition. We are working on collecting the data around what consequences had better effects and what consequences were more-often ignored. We took parent and student satisfaction surveys as well as Member surveys. We will work to determine the level of satisfaction on behalf of all we are serving and will soon issue a report.

The Youth Court Alliance Members (those who ran the court) all agreed that the experience helped them learn more about their community, school and peers. They indicated that it changed their perspective on
their own career paths – for instance, one young woman who is now going to college to become a Kindergarten teacher, said she will work more closely with parents to find the reason for children's absences, rather than just assuming that the parents do not care.

Success, however, is best told through word of mouth. As emailed to me from one of York City's district magistrates:

I had a kid in front of me two weeks ago. Mom said major problems most of the second half of the year but that the last 6 weeks have been a turn around. Why? What made the difference? Apparently it was Youth Court! This student was at YC for truancy but the positives out of the YC experience included better grades, passing to the next grade and better behavior at home.

The York County Human Services Department has committed funds to expand the Youth Court Alliance to two additional school districts in the Fall of 2012. Southeastern and Hanover school districts, as well as their partnering District Magistrates, have indicated an interest in serving as the expansion sites for Youth Court Alliance in 2012-13. William Penn will also "expand" by holding hearings twice per week and serving ninth AND tenth graders. The youth who ran Youth Court Alliance in the 2011-12 school year will be training the youth at Southeastern and Hanover school districts over the summer.

Thank you,

Leigh Dalton, Esq.
June 15, 2012

Philadelphia City Council
Attn: Public Safety Committee

Dear Committee Members:

This letter is to serve as informational testimony at the June 19, 2012, public hearing regarding youth courts.

**Pima County Teen Court** and **Teen Court in the Schools** are programs of Pima Prevention Partnership (PPP), a 501c3 community-based organization based in Tucson, Arizona, that builds partnerships with young people, families and communities to improve their quality of life. Started in 1991 as a grassroots community coalition whose members convened to address adolescent substance abuse in Pima County, PPP is a leader in creating positive change at the individual, family, and community levels. PPP focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable populations. During the 2009-10 fiscal year, PPP programs served 8,368 children and adolescents, 2,651 adults and families, and 52 community coalitions in communities in Tucson and other parts of Arizona, the United States, and Pacific Island jurisdictions.

All of PPP’s programs, including Pima County Teen Court (PCTC) and Teen Court in the Schools (TCIS), were initiated as a result of a community-identified need and founded in evidence-based practices. Presided over by a host of professional judges from both Juvenile and Superior Courts, the Pima County Teen Court is a diversion program that uses the principles of restorative justice, coupled with sentencing options administered by a trained jury of juvenile peers to prevent recidivism.

Established in 1995 as a community response to the over-representation of minority youths in the Pima County juvenile justice system, the Pima County Teen Court has lowered juvenile recidivism risk of thousands of Pima County adolescents and successfully reduced delinquency among juveniles who have completed the program.

In contrast to many juvenile justice-based youth court programs, Pima County Teen Court is community-based. The Pima County Teen Court accepts referrals from Pima County Juvenile Court Center (PCJCC) for youth 12-17 arrested for crimes approved for diversion. Youths enter Teen Court by participating in a sentencing hearing where they account for the behavior that led up to their arrest. They are sentenced by a peer jury, presided over by an adult judge, to complete a set of constructive consequences, sentences designed to impart consequences for their crimes, address the harm caused, restore relationships, and increase participants’ skills.

PCTC holds hearings in two Tucson locations and has the capacity to hear up to 450 cases per year. Since its inception in 1995, more than 6,000 Teen Court hearings have taken place. PCTC is funded...
entirely by grants secured by PPP. The program is staffed by 2.3 FTE and has an annual budget of around $180,000.

The core components of PCTC, as conducted by PPP, include:

- Recruiting, training, and recognizing youth and adult volunteers
- Maintaining a courtroom and educational space for hearings and workshops
- Facilitating/overseeing Teen Court hearings (2-4 court sessions per month hearing 5-20 cases at each)
- Facilitating/overseeing all consequences assigned by the Teen Court jury (including jury duty, six different educational workshops offered twice per month, journal writing, and independent studies)
- Managing the caseload of referrals for compliance
- Communicating with PCICC probation officers along with way ending with a report of compliance or non-compliance for the referred youth
- Funding research and procurement, including grant and report writing
- Program evaluation
- Data management

Teen Court in the Schools is a school-based program supported by PPP but administered by individual schools. Since 1995, PPP has received various funding to specifically support aspects of TCIS (including expansion into high schools, facilitating/coordinating family strengthening workshops, and providing courtroom/classroom supplies), but funding for the main components of TCIS is provided by the individual school. Though funding for TCIS through PPP may wax and wane, it remains a core component of PPP’s commitment to the community. As such, the following basic services have been consistently available to Pima County schools regardless of funding availability:

- Training of school staff to implement and maintain TCIS
- Observations of classes and hearings to provide professional feedback
- Technical assistance and troubleshooting with program implementation and maintenance
- Presentations on juvenile law
- Representation at the Arizona Teen Court Association and the National Association of Youth Courts

As programs of Pima Prevention Partnership, Pima County Teen Court and Teen Court in the Schools are benefitted by the indirect services provided by PPP, including:

- Payroll
- Human resources
- Fund development
- Grants and contract management
- Accounting and billing

Arizona is home to an estimated 50 youth court programs, one of the largest concentrations of youth courts in the nation. As such, programs are fortunate to have the Arizona Teen Court Association (AzTCA) as an additional resource. AzTCA is a networking group created and guided by Arizona youth courts and maintained by the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education. The mission of AzTCA is to support teen courts in Arizona that empower youth in their communities to help change negative and delinquent behavior in their peers. Its goals are to:
- Promote sustainability and development of teen courts in Arizona
- Offer a forum for networking among staff members of Teen Courts to exchange ideas and discuss issues thereby improving the administration of their programs
- Educate youth
- Foster civic engagement of youth to increase social and emotional well-being
- Build collaborations that increase the effectiveness and consistency of Teen Court programs across Arizona
- Promote and publicize Arizona Teen Courts

AzTCA also hosts an annual Youth Summit. Youth volunteers attend the summit to learn more about law-related education and law-related professions, network with other youth volunteers, and hone their court skills. Adult facilitators attend trainings on diversifying funding, constructing restorative consequences, implementing a youth court, and other topics related to running a successful youth court both within the schools and the community. Each year more than 100 youth volunteers participate.

Pima Prevention Partnership has found youth court to be an effective and efficient alternative to the juvenile justice system and one that can be readily duplicated in other communities.

To date, Pima County Teen Court staff has worked with advisors from Chester High School Youth Court in Chester, Pennsylvania, to promote the youth court model. We are happy to continue this relationship for the good of our nation’s youth and heartily encourage the Philadelphia City Council to offer its support as well.

Please contact us anytime for additional information or support.

Sincerely,

Adelita S. Grijalva
Associate Director
June 13, 2012

Philadelphia City Council
City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107

Dear Council Members,

My name is Judy Wolfe and I am the program supervisor for the Syracuse City School District Student Courts, immediate past president of the Association of New York State Youth Courts, serve on the board of trustees for the National Association of Youth Courts and I am a past director of the Onondaga County Youth Court. I have been asked by Greg Voltz, Esq. to provide you with some insight to youth courts.

My first introduction to Youth Court was 15 years ago when I accepted a position as director of the Onondaga County Youth Courts. Youth Court is a diversion program that constructively sentences juvenile offenders and allows them the opportunity to become accountable to the community for their unlawful behavior and accept responsibility for their bad choices. The community based Youth Court is designed to serve first time offenders (ages 7-15, in NYS 16 and older are treated as adults in the CRJ system) who are charged with offenses such as shoplifting, trespassing, criminal mischief, minor drug and alcohol offenses. Probation officers and police officers offer Youth Court as an alternative to traditional juvenile sanctions. The purpose of the community based youth court is to reduce repeat incidents of juvenile crime. It diverts offending youth from the juvenile justice system, provides an alternative to the Family Court process and deters further negative contact with police. Positive peer pressure in the Youth Court setting is undoubtedly the most powerful aspect being both constructive and educational. Proceeding through Youth Court provides a more immediate and meaningful effect on the young person than the traditional juvenile justice system. Youth Court is based on the premise that young people want to do what is right when making decisions. Those who make the wrong choice are most often gratified to learn that they have an opportunity to make amends in Youth Court. By successfully completing the sanctions set forth by Youth Court the young person does not have a permanent record of the charge, in essence, they are given a second chance. Youth Court educates the youth who operate it, providing them with an understanding of the laws and workings of the justice system, as well as an opportunity to interact with local law enforcement and justice officials. They develop public speaking skills and debate techniques, all while providing an important service for their peers and the community. Youth committing minor offenses are often overlooked, but can be appropriately handled in a meaningful way through Youth Court, benefiting not only themselves but the community as well. I periodically receive emails from past Youth Court members who are now working in the legal field; they all have credited their service in Youth Court as helping them reach their career goals. The above mentioned type of youth court is the most prominent type around the country.

As a result of my work with the community based Youth Court I was asked to help develop “disciplinary courts” for the Syracuse City School District. Eleven years ago I introduced school based Youth Courts (which
we call “Student Courts”) to the Syracuse City School District. It is a voluntary alternative to suspension for young people who face disciplinary action by the school district. A youth who admits to the charge appears before a sentencing hearing before a court of his/her trained peers. The goal of the Student Court is to improve student citizenship skills and decrease problematic behavior. It strives to promote positive feelings of self-worth and a desire for self improvement as well as fostering a healthy attitude toward rules and authority. Members of the court receive law related education and learn how to speak publicly and improve their critical thinking skills. Each year we have four 3rd year law students on fellowship, from the Syracuse University College of Law, work with our student members. The Syracuse City School District Student Court provides a means of positively dealing with negative behaviors of young people in a school setting. In an effort to keep students in school the Student Court is set up to address early violations of the school district’s code of conduct. It serves as another option the district can use to address infractions of student conduct. Keeping students in school, keeps them out of the community unsupervised. The sanctions students receive are constructive and aim toward helping them improve their experience in school; these sanctions include tutoring, progress reports, seeing a school counselor, psychologist, or social worker, apologies and sometimes community service. It is not unusual to have a student attend court and then ask how they can become involved in the program. The vast majority of respondents feel the process is fair and a good option for schools to use to address disciplinary problems. By completing the process the respondents do not have a permanent blemish on their record. By having the student members assist in governing their own schools they are able to set the boundaries on acceptable behavior in the classroom. Membership helps the young people explore career opportunities and is regarded favorably by college admissions. The Syracuse City School District has 3 high school courts and 4 middle school courts, 2 of which are also afterschool programs. A youth counselor at one of our buildings provided this incite: “One of the best indicators of a program's success can be seen in the students behavior when they are not in the program” Twan Escho states “I know that as a youth counselor in an urban city school district we need all kinds of incentives or tricks to keep youth engaged. The Student Court at Danforth Middle School has found a recipe for success. The students understand that they have to behave in a manner that represents the program in a positive light. Many examples of this can be seen throughout the school on a daily basis. The students who are called upon to set the standard know that they have to act according to the Student Courts mission. I have witnessed a student forget their commitments in school but when the mission of the Student Court is brought to their attention they refocus and get back on track.

School based youth courts are the fastest growing type of youth court in the country. I get several calls from districts all over the country each year asking for information about our Student Courts. It truly is a win/win situation for all.

Very truly yours,

Judy Wolfe

Judy Wolfe
Program Supervisor
Ms. Shoshana Bricklin and The Honorable Members of the Philadelphia City Council "Public Safety Council":

Greg Volz and I started a conversation about the virtues and viability of Youth Courts several years ago and here we are again advocating and promoting the many benefits that this option brings to our Juvenile Justice System, treasured youth, families and the entire community.

I have attached background information about the Teen Court Peer Jury Model we have operated in Ingham County Michigan since 2001.

Please feel free to present, share and use this information to help your Public Safety Committee and Members of the Philadelphia City Council. If you need clarification or feel I can help in your quest to consider support for Greg's initiative, do not hesitate to email or phone me at your convenience.

Promoting Law Education and Safe Choices in Youth is what Teen Court is all about in our community. There are 14 functioning Youth Courts in our state and we do collaborate as a Michigan Coalition of Youth Courts whenever possible.

Teen Court of Ingham County has been instrumental in advocating and assisting other Michigan Communities to implement similar Peer Jury Teen Court Models in Grand Rapids Michigan of Kent County, St. Johns Michigan of Clinton County and a School Based Youth Court in Ypsilanti High School Ypsilanti Michigan.

We have experienced a measure of success and will be happy to share our story,

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Mike Botke, Director
Teen Court, JJ Program Child Family Charities
217 South Capitol Ave.
Lansing, MI 48933
Phone: 517-371-2823
Cell Phone: 927-0770
Fax: 517-371-2836
teencourtlansing@cooley.edu
TEEN COURT has provided juvenile justice diversion services in Ingham County to 175-200 first-time juvenile offenders (Respondents) per year since 2001. Youth between the ages of 11-16 who have committed an offense have their petitions reviewed and referred by the Ingham County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and Circuit Court—Family Division. When entering the program they must take responsibility for their offense (admit guilt) and participate in a variety of requirements and services that are designed to help them address risk factors, (such as negative peer pressure, underage drinking, poor school performance), that may have contributed to their poor choice, resulting in a criminal offense. In addition, the Respondent (juvenile offender) must complete a Final Disposition issued by a trained Jury of their Peers, i.e., (“we the Peer Jurors think you should perform the following orders to repair the harm you caused and restore to the community what has been lost”). When completing the 90 day program the Respondent's petition is dismissed and the youth does not incur a formal juvenile criminal record. Currently the program is achieving a 90% success rate, which means less than 10% fail to complete the program and do not commit additional crimes.

Annually, over 500 students are trained and serve as Peer Jurors, Bailiffs and Clerks in hearings conducted in the Cooley Law School in Lansing and Ingham County Courthouse in Mason. Students are recruited from eight (8) different high schools (Dansville, East Lansing, Mason, Williamston, Eastern, Everett, Sexton and Okemos) during the school year. In the summer months, youth are recruited throughout Ingham County. While they deliver a positive peer pressure message through issuing sanctions to hold the Respondent accountable, participants are engaged in a positive way in our juvenile justice system. Often Peer Jurors will issue a sanction for Respondents to return to Teen Court and serve as a Peer Juror, which affords them the opportunity to truly contribute to the community and become part of solution and not labeled the problem.

The Teen Court Program receives funding from Capital Area United Way, Ingham County Juvenile Justice Millage, Mid-South Substance Abuse Commission, City of Lansing Human Services and Community Relations and Lansing Mayor’s Committee For Drug Free Youth and in kind donations from Thomas M. Cooley Law School and Ingham County Partner Schools.

TEEN COURT is a community based and highly collaborative program of Child and Family Charities. Child and Family was established in 1911 as the Ingham County Branch of the Michigan Children’s Aid Society. Other programs include foster care, adoption, independent living (youth aging out of foster care), adolescent substance abuse treatment, family mental health counseling, and Angel House, an emergency shelter and advocacy center for abused and neglected children.

Contact: Robert Easterly, Youth/Family Advocate – 648.5281
Priscilla Riojas, St. Law Instructor – 371.2823
Mike Botke, Director – 927.0770
Teen Court, Juvenile Justice Intervention Prevention Education Program  
Division Of Child & Family Charities

**History**
The Teen Court Intervention, Prevention, Education Diversionary Program was conducted as a pilot project for one year, beginning on September 7th, 2000. Near the end of the pilot year, community leaders fully implemented the program and hired a fulltime director on April 10th, 2001. The program was established through a collaboration committee under the auspices of Mayor David Hollister’s, “Drug Free Youth Task Force”. 30th Judicial Circuit Court Officials and other judicial officials throughout Ingham County supported the program’s development and implementation. Thomas M. Cooley Law School provided office space to house the program and with the completion of the Cooley Law Center’s Moot Courtrooms in 2004, Teen Court was granted the use of these facilities to conduct hearing activities. This “home court” enabled the program to build capacity to serve more youth. In 2006, hearings were also initiated in Mason County Courthouse to bring the program to rural areas in all of Ingham County. In October of 2008 the Teen Court became a Program of Child & Family Services, Capitol Area. On Friday, October 15, 2010 the community celebrated Teen Court’s 10 Year Anniversary!

**Lansing Teen Court Mission**

“To Engage And Strengthen Youth, Through:
- Restorative Justice Principles,
- Through Family and Community Collaboration,
- Resolving Juvenile Justice Challenges,
- Promoting Personal Responsibility and Accountability”

**Lansing Teen Court Goals and Program Outcomes**

- Provide first time Respondents (youth offenders) a chance to clear their record and experience success.
- Reduce Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Recidivism and be cost effective.
- Reduce youth involvement in illegal use of alcohol and other harmful drugs.
- Minimize Risk Factors and increase Protective Factors to promote good citizenship.
- Educate youth regarding our Juvenile Justice System and our Laws.
- Promote a Juvenile Justice environment that utilizes Restorative Justice Principles.

**Key Program Partners**

- **Ingham County Prosecutor’s Office/Formal Juvenile Courts:** screens and refers cases.
- **Dansville, East Lansing, Mason, Lansing, Okemos, and Williamston School Districts:** access to classrooms in high Schools to recruit and train student volunteers to serve as Peer Jurors.
- **Community Partnering Agencies:** provide volunteer community service opportunities, substance abuse and mental health screenings, and access to other vital services to address family needs.
- **Judges from 30th Judicial Circuit Court, 54-A and 55th District Courts and Cooley Law Professors:** oversee courtroom procedures and guide program officials to educate participants about the impact of crime, Juvenile Justice System, how courtrooms function and our Rules of Law.
- **Thomas M. Cooley Law School:** provides inkind donations of courtroom facilities, offices for business operations and classroom space for Street Law Education Workshops. Cooley Law Students also serve as Youth Advocates, Adult Jury Monitors and assist with Street Law Workshops.
- **Lansing Teen Court Program Officials:** coordinate, conduct, and implement Program Operations.

**Primary (Current Funding/In-kind) Partners – [Projected Per Youth Costs < $200.00]**

- **City of Lansing**, Human Relations and Community Services: $15,000 (July 1, 11 – June 30, 2012)
- **Ingham Co. Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition:** $44,000 (October 1, 11 – September 30, 2012)
- **Ingham County Juvenile Justice Millage:** $30,000 (January 1, 2012 – December 31, 2012)
- **Capital Area United Way:** $36,382 (May 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012)
- **Lansing Mayor’s Committee For Drug Free Youth:** $5,000 (July 1, 11 – June 30, 2012)
- **Cooley Law** Provides In Kind Office Space, Court Rooms, Volunteer and technical assistance.
- Eight (8) School Districts provide access to student volunteers and transportation support.
Cooley Law Student Volunteer: I like serving as a Respondent Advocate as they work through the steps of the program. I also think the restorative nature of the program benefits everyone involved.

Respondent: I was in the program for shoplifting. Teen Court gave me the tools and chance to learn from this experience in a positive way. I really liked the different Street Law Classes.

Student Volunteer Juror: I learned more about how courts function and the importance of choices. The experience made me think twice about my own personal choices.

Parent: The program helped me get my daughter back. As a parent her actions made me think twice about trust issues. I really liked how she got the chance to return as a Peer Juror and give back.

Victim: Shoplifting affects everyone. Stores lose money when people steal and then we have to raise our prices. Individuals choosing to shoplift will face consequences; responsibility starts with them.

Respondent: I was caught with marijuana. I caused a lot of stress, tension and mistrust amongst my family. The Teen Court experience was stressful, but interesting and I got to make up for my mistake and not have it on my record.

Victim: My personal stuff was stolen from my locker. I felt like I lost trust that I had in my peers. I felt violated in a place that should be safe and secure. I was angry, shocked and disappointed, but I have forgiven them for their mistakes.

Student Volunteer Juror: I liked the interaction with the Respondent during the hearing and I learned about the consequences of violating the law. I loved the lunch we were given!

Teacher: Students that attend Teen Court bond together and discuss their experiences long after their Teen Court day is over. I’m always amazed by the ability of teenagers to use their insightfulness and personal experiences to help their peers.

Parent: Having my daughter’s peers hand down the sentencing really hit home for her. She now thinks about the consequences of her actions and how they affect others. I think it was a fair process.

Respondent: The court hearing was a little scary, but I learned so much about the consequences of shoplifting. I also liked the Street Law workshops.

Parent: When my son had to go to the Ingham County Jail for the Scared Straight Program that was the turning point. He got help learning responsibility for what he did and learned how his actions harmed his relationship to the community through completing community service.
Advisory Council Members

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<th>NAME</th>
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<td>Thomas M. Cooley Law School</td>
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<td>Debbie DeLeon, Commissioner</td>
<td>Ingham County Commissioners</td>
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<td>Sam Davis, Major</td>
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<td>Glender Anderson, EAP</td>
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<td>Janelle Lawless, Judge</td>
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<td>Jeff Venn</td>
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<td>Jim DeLine, Supervisor</td>
<td>Accounting, Lansing Police Department</td>
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<td>Jim Pettibone, Attorney</td>
<td>Ingham County Prosecutor’s Office</td>
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<td>Joel Hoepfner, Prevention Spec.</td>
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<td>Joel Lubick, Teacher</td>
<td>Eastern High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Kraus, Lt.</td>
<td>Lansing Police Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha Adams, EAP</td>
<td>UAW Local 602, Community Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick Toodzio, Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Mason High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teresa Ellis, Analyst</td>
<td>Department of Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Joan Jackson Johnson</td>
<td>City of Lansing – Human Relations Community Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Staff**

- Mike Botke: Director
- Robert Easterly: Youth/Family Advocate/Street Law Instructor
- Priscillia Riojas: Street Law Instructor

Committed To: Rebuilding Relationships – Repairing Harm – Problem Solving – Building Capacities
Accountability – Personal Responsibility – Public Safety
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Teen Court is a juvenile justice diversion program that provides first-time juvenile respondents (offenders) the opportunity to take personal responsibility for a criminal offense committed without establishing a formal juvenile record. The Ingham County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and Ingham County 30th Judicial Circuit Court Family Division Intake Referees screens and refers active petitions. Ingham County Judges and Ingham County Formal Juvenile Court Referees (and or Cooley Law Professor/Attorneys) preside over each case during the hearing step in the process. A trained Peer Jury comprised of Ingham County High School District teens questions the respondent, and his or her parent/guardian, and victim to determine the final disposition of the case. The Peer Jury does not determine guilt or innocence but deliberates only on an appropriate disposition (orders) for the juvenile respondent. The intervention, prevention and education measures include a series of program steps designed to address underlying issues that cause young people to violate Laws. Juvenile crime, (all crime) is a public safety concern and strikes at fundamental relationships impacting on our youth and everyone in our community. All program activity is grounded in Restorative Justice Principles, such as, rebuilding relationships, repairing harm, solving problems, and building community capacities, which guide participants to restore to the community what has been lost. Once the respondent has completed the final disposition orders the offense is dismissed and no criminal record is incurred. Successful respondents are invited back to serve as Peer Jurors, bringing them back into the community as a valued contributor, to become fully part of the solution versus labeled as the problem.

When families of the juvenile respondents are contacted to determine their interest in having their child’s case heard in Teen Court, they are informed their decision is strictly voluntary. One of the criteria for participation is that the juvenile respondent must freely admit guilt and demonstrate willingness to participate in the Teen Court process. In addition to pre-hearing documents that must be signed by the respondent and parents/guardians, family members are required to complete a survey designed to assess the juvenile’s basic educational competencies and social awareness levels. These Parent/Guardian and Respondent Surveys also contain questions regarding assessments of probable levels of alcohol use and the abuse of other illegal drugs in the juvenile. All intake information is reviewed to determine the need to refer the juvenile for further substance abuse assessment, academic tutoring, family counseling, and other identified needs. Case management goals developed for each individual participant result in monitoring progress based upon identified youth and family needs. A volunteer Youth Advocate is assigned to each Respondent to assist staff in guiding them through the steps of the program where appropriate. These Youth Advocates are short term mentors who accept weekly progress calls, support Street Law Workshop involvement and also provide support during the hearing step.

In addition, the Lansing Teen Court promotes a different approach to the juvenile justice process. Respondents are not looked upon as criminals. Court officials, judges, parents, teen volunteers, juvenile respondents and other stakeholders involved in the process, are encouraged to work towards positive solutions that result in rebuilding damaged relationships, repairing the harm caused, resolving problems and building community capacities that will address the underlying risk factors that lead to juvenile crime and restore to the community what has been lost.

This unique approach is not intended to diminish the responsibility of the Respondent’s behavior; rather, the Teen Court method holds them accountable and expects the Respondent to accept responsibility for their actions. The Teen Court sends a strong message to the youth respondents, and the messenger itself plays an equally important role in the process. Teens telling teens that their behavior is not acceptable sends a positive peer pressure message, i.e., “…act responsibly and make better choices, which will result in personal success”.

Youth Courts are being established in communities across the country. In 1996 there were only 78 sanctioned Youth Courts and today there are nearly 1,200, which mean more and more communities are adopting this approach in local juvenile justice communities. Lansing Teen Court has been operating for nearly eight years and the data we are collecting is demonstrating the value of this unique approach, as 90% of the respondents are successfully completing the program requirements and final dispositions issued by their peer jury. In addition, the teen volunteers are reporting a 98% satisfaction rating regarding the benefits of serving as a Peer Juror.
**PROGRAM STEPS AND PROTOCOLS**

**Referrals:** Teen Court receives referrals from the Ingham County Prosecuting Attorney and formal Juvenile Court Referees. The Teen Court Administrator is responsible for further screening candidates based on these criteria:

1. Misdemeanor offenses (Retail Fraud, MDOP, MIP Tobacco / Alcohol / Marijuana, Resisting A Police Officer, Unlawful Use of a Motor Vehicle, Larceny from a Building / Car, Weapon Possession / Soft Air / Pocket Knife, Receiving & Concealing Stolen Property, Enter Without Permission, Miss-Use of a Telecommunication Device, and other First Time Offenses.
2. Youth between ages of 11 - 16 years
3. Parent/guardian willingness to participate and attend hearing
4. Juvenile must admit guilt (no contest)
5. Assaults Domestic or otherwise that do not involve serious injury
6. Alcohol/other drug related offenses
7. No pending felony charges, prior felony or formal adjudication history
8. Review of juvenile’s background and pertinent records such as academic standing
9. Personal interview and intake with juvenile/parent/guardian

**Respondent and Teen Volunteer “Protocols”:**
(The following “PROTOCOLS” are used to guide the services and training activities for all youth participants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVENTION/PREVENTION</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL/PREVENTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cases screened/referred by Prosecutor</td>
<td>1. Junior/Senior High Students attend 2 hour training</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Respondent/Family sign Consent To Participate</td>
<td>- Learn Juror, Bailiff, and Clerk roles</td>
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<td>3. Hearing Scheduled in Mason or Lansing</td>
<td>- Rules of Law, Court Room Procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Intake/JIFF Service Screen completed</td>
<td>- Impact of Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Case Management Plan completed</td>
<td>- How to apply Restorative Justice Principles</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Required attendance at biweekly Street Law Workshops</td>
<td>- Sign Confidentiality Oath to Participate</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Partner links/referrals implemented</td>
<td>- Substance Use/Abuse Links to Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Respondent/Family reports weekly progress</td>
<td>2. Attend Monthly Hearings -</td>
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<td>9. 12 to 18 hearings conducted monthly</td>
<td>- Listen to Judge’s Summary of Petition</td>
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<td>10. Respondent Admits Guilt In Courtroom</td>
<td>- Question Respondent/Parents-Guardians/Victims</td>
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<td>11. Jurors ask questions of Respondent/Parent</td>
<td>- Jury Members determine Disposition</td>
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<td>12. Jury deliberation determines sanctions</td>
<td>- Deliver Final Disposition Orders in Court Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. All participants sign in agreement of orders</td>
<td>4. Complete debriefing to process their experiences</td>
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<td>15. Disposition: Adult Advocate provides direction</td>
<td>5. Receive Program Recognition for Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Respondents complete all sanctions and requirements</td>
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<td>17. Evaluations completed/offense dismissed-clear record</td>
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**Juror Qualifications**
Jurors must be enrolled in grades 10 - 12, except if ordered to jury duty as part of a previous disposition in Teen Court. (Exceptions can be made based upon a youth’s maturity level and ability to participate responsibly.)
If a juvenile is ordered to jury duty, they must attend the training before serving. Jurors are judicial representatives through their participation in Teen Court and must act in a respective manner. Youth residing in neighboring counties are also recruited and encouraged to serve as Peer Jurors during the summer months.

Sample Program Accomplishments and Outcomes:

- **Teen Court’s partnerships continue to grow** through participation in the Community Coalition For Youth and the Ingham County Substance Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council by connecting participants to appropriate community resources to address risk factors that can lead to juvenile crime.

- **Petitions no longer linger** in the system, as our partnership with the Courts and Prosecutor’s Office has increased the timeliness of referring petitions resulting in learning accountable/responsibility.

- **Respondents, Student Volunteers, Parents/Guardians, Victims and community volunteers continue to provide positive feedback through post-program surveys.** These tools are designed to determine service satisfaction, new knowledge gained, shifts in attitude and behavior, improvement in relationships, improvement in school attendance/performance, etc. Over 98% indicate a very positive experience. (A Success rate for program completion is currently at 89 %.) In October of 2005 and again in July of 2008, the Ingham County Prosecuting Attorney’s office completed a review of all Teen Court referrals to determine whether they have come into contact with the courts due to committing additional offenses. Less than 11% failed the program or committed a 2nd offense making the Teen Court Juvenile Justice Diversion Program a powerful intervention, prevention and education tool to reduce juvenile crime.

- **Judges from Family Court, 54-A and 55th District Courts continue to serve during hearings, lending support, experience and credibility to the process.** The following judicial officials and community volunteers have guided court proceedings in previous program years during the hearing step: 30th Judicial Circuit Court Family Division Judges, Laura Baird, Janelle Lawless, Probate Administrator George Strander, Judges Don Allen and Tom Boyd of 55th District Court in Mason and 54-A District Court Judges Louise Alderson, Frank Deluca, Charles Filice in Lansing. In addition, Cooley Law Professors/Attorneys Marjorie Russell, Evelyn Calogero, Joan Vestranda, John Kane, Mable Martin-Scott, Anne Wood, Gary Bauer, Don Peterson, Nancy Wonch, and Cynthia Ward have served as Honorary Judges. In addition Ingham County Family, Friend of the Court and District Court, Attorney/Referees Dean Winnie, Deb Frederick, Tom Fruechtenicht and Law Clerks, Amy Barnard, Crystal Dixon, Leah Good, Megan Smolen and Attorneys’ Peter Brown and Elizabeth Stomski have also served. Judges indicate positive support for the resulting educational and service-learning experience Peer Jurors receive and accountability benefits the program steps provide for the respondents.

- **Teen Court continues to improve ways to ensure victims of juvenile crimes are receiving appropriate services and that their needs are being met.** All identified victims are invited to participate directly in the program hearing process or indirectly by completing a written victim impact statement. Teen Court also provides direct Restorative Justice Services, such as, Transformative Conferencing to help resolve ongoing conflict between victims and Respondents.

- **At the close of the 2011 year, Teen Court has received 2,008 referrals from the Ingham County Prosecutor and Formal Juvenile Courts.** From these referrals 1,619 Respondents successfully completed the program, 42 continue in the process and 151 failed resulting in an 89% success rate. Over the course of the past 10 years Respondents have logged over 16,000 hours of volunteer community service work and over $3,600 has been collected and paid to victims of juvenile crimes through the Teen Court Program.

- **Through December of 2011, over 5,608 students throughout Ingham County schools and community volunteers in the tri-county area have received training and served in scheduled hearings as Jurors, Bailiffs and Clerks.** Teachers report students are participating in a service learning opportunity unlike anything they can achieve in a classroom. (School partners now encompass Williamston, Sexton, Everett, Eastern, Mason, Okemos, Dansville and East Lansing.)

- **Students from Cooley Law, MSU and LCC are serving as Respondent Advocates** to guide youth through program steps, act as Jury Monitors to help resolve technical issues and engage respondents in Street Law Workshops led by Instructor DeAndre Carter. New data collection from Respondent Weekly Street Law Educational Workshops is demonstrating the value of educating our youth about
our Rules of Law and the consequences of criminal behavior. The workshops are two hours in length and focus upon reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors. The workshops are skill oriented and instill in youth the importance of “Critical Thinking”, “Good Decision Making”.
**TARGET POPULATION / PROGRAM CONDITIONS**

1.1 Eligible: Youth ages 11-16

**Petition Criteria:**
- First time Juvenile Offenders (FTJO) / Misdemeanors
- Must Admit Responsibility
- Residents of Ingham County
- Risk Factors and Poor Choices Resulted in Offense
- Parental Consent and Cooperation Required
- Review Background

**PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

1.2 Local High Schools Permit Access to train students to perform "Accountability" Peer Jury Duty / Supported by Teacher

1.3 Respondents (FTJO) are supervised by Teen Court Staff / Youth Advocate Volunteers (Law Students/College Interns)

1.4 Ingham County Judges / Private Attorneys / Law Professors

1.5 Offenders Referred by Ingham County PA / Family Ct. Referees

1.6 Teen Court Offices, Program Operations and Court Facilities donated in kind by Cooley Law School, Ingham County

1.7 Community Partners, Service Providers and Stakeholders

Collaborate

**SYSTEM NEEDS**

1.8 Reduction of Recidivism.

1.9 Reduce Risk Behavior/Increase Protective Factors

1.10 Promote Youth Law Education/Safe Choices

1.11 Substance Use/Abuse Reduction.

1.12 Restorative Justice Alternative

1.13 Access to Insurance / Access to Substance Use Treatment Service

---

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

4.1 Respondents (offenders) will:
- Earn Petition Dismissal
- Demonstrate Accountability
- Repair Harm (Acts of Reparation)
- Increase Constructive Use of Time
- Increase Positive Self Identity
- Gain Law Knowledge
- Increase Critical Thinking Skills
- Family/Parents Learn To Problem Solve / Increase Communication Skills

4.2 Peer Juror Participants will:
- Perform the duties of Peer Jurors, Bailiffs and Clerks in scheduled hearings
- Have a voice / Experience community engagement
- Deliberate and Issue a Fair, Just and Appropriate Sanctions
- "...here is what we think you should do to repair harm"
- Gain Law Knowledge / Court Functions / Consequences and Costs of Criminal Harm
- Learn Constructive Use of Time/Community Engagement

4.3 Ingham County Schools / Community Will Benefit From:
- Positive Peer Influence
- Apply Restorative Justice Principles to Juvenile Justice
- Increase Respect For and From Juvenile Justice System Through Service Learning
- Decrease Court Dockets Resulting in Decreased Costs
- Expedit Petitions (Decrease service wait/learn consequence)
- Youth Learn Value of and Perform Community Service
- Collaborate to Promote Law Education and Safe Choices in Youth Across Ingham County
- Gain Access to Insurance and Services to resolve needs.

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**COMPONENTS**

3.1a TC Staff Schedule Monthly Accountability Hearings / Recruit Judges/Judiciary/Law Professor Officials to oversee Hearings

3.1b TC Staff Schedule Training in 8 Ingham County High Schools

3.1c High Schools Rotate Monthly during School Calendar

- 2 Hours of training (Includes Mock Hearing)
- Training Packet includes Peer Jury, Bailiff and Clerk Duties
- Teen Court staff presents training to class (Oath Signed / Summer Jury Pool / Pre-test administered to students)
- Transportation / Parent Permission by Teacher

3.1d Teachers collect permission slips and organize Peer Juries, assign Bailiff and Clerk duties for six (6) scheduled hearings

3.2a TC Staff Orient Interns / Adult Advocates deliver guidance:
- Guide Offenders In Program Steps (Short Term Mentors)
- Monitor progress by phone contacts / St. Law Attendance
- Guide youth jury during deliberation / Document Progress

3.2b Assign Case #, log referrals from PA / Family Ct. Referees

3.2c Send out notification letters / Schedule Intakes for Respondents

3.2d Conduct and complete: Take and other information forms

3.2e Parents schedule service screening (JIFF) at Child & Family Charities / Attend "Staying Connected To Your Teen Workshops"

3.2f Respondent Begins Activities, St. Law, Community Service

3.2g Victim Contact, Options for Involvement / Needs Resolved

3.3a Judge / Honorary Judge Oversees Hearing Process (Script)

3.3b Respondent Admits Responsibility (guilt) to Peer Jury

3.3c Jury Questions Respondent, Parents / Victims

3.3d Jury deliberates, determines sanctions, delivers disposition

3.3e Respondent, Parent, TC Official and Judge sign disposition

3.3f Jurors Complete Post-Survey, Debriefing, Receive Recognition

3.4a Staff monitors Progress (average time spent, 90-120 days)

3.4b Requirements / Disposition Orders include:
- Attend School On Time and Demonstrate Progress, Peer Jury Duty, Community Service, Street Law Attendance,
- Jail Tours, School Progress, Reflective Essays, Curfew, Respect Family Goals and Boundaries
- Treatment/Counseling, Drug Screens, Assist With Expenses

3.4c Earn Dismissal of Petition After Successful Completion / Exit Survey Conducted with Respondent and Caregiver (Parent)
Referrals to Teen Court are made from the Ingham County Prosecuting Attorney and Formal Juvenile Court Referees based on specific criteria. The Teen Court Administrator is responsible for further screening candidates using the following criteria:

1. Misdemeanor offense
2. Offender between ages of 11 - 16 years
3. Parent/Guardian’s willingness to participate
4. Juvenile’s willingness to participate and must admit guilt
5. Assault and Domestic Assault Offenses (No serious injury.)
6. Alcohol/Marijuana related offense
7. No pending felony charges or prior felony adjudication
8. Review of juvenile’s background and pertinent records
9. Information from a personal interview with juvenile and parent/guardian/custodian
10. In school and demonstrating progress.

Program Protocol:
1. Cases screened/referred monthly to LTC.
2. LTC contact with Respondent/Family for scheduled Intake with Teen Court Officials.
3. Respondent/Family sign Consent to participate/Intake Forms Completed with Teen Court Officials.
4. Schedule and complete JIFF Service Screening with Counselor at Child & Family Services.
5. Restorative Justice Activities Begin. / Transformative Conferencing Option explained.
6. Peer Jury led Accountability Hearing Court Date Scheduled.
8. Respondent/Family Intake Forms completed.
10. Attendance at bi-weekly Street Law Workshops and Parent Workshop Series with Teen Court Staff.
11. Partner links/referrals implemented for identified services needed.
12. Respondent/Family reports weekly progress with Adult Volunteer Mentors guided by staff.
13. Case Report sent to Judges for review.
14. Twelve to eighteen (12 - 18) hearings conducted monthly. (1 date in Mason and 2 in Lansing).
16. Peer Jury issues their sanctions - “here is what we think you should do to repair harm get back on track.
17. Peer Jury Chair delivers Final Disposition.
18. Respondent, parent, Teen Court Official and Judge sign in agreement of Sanctions.
19. Final Disposition begins along with basic Teen Court requirements guided by Adult Advocate assigned.
20. Victim Involvement based upon Law and Sanctions.
21. Case diversion status reported to Prosecutor/Formal Courts.
22. Post-program questionnaire completed by Respondent/family.
23. Case is closed/offense dismissed-clear record.

Targeted Program Outcomes:

- Reduce Underage Drinking and Use of Other Illegal Drugs
- Earn Dismissal of Juvenile Criminal Offense Petition (no formal record incurred)
- Gain New Law Knowledge and Personal Skills
- Spend Constructive Time Engaging in Valued Activity – practice “Good Citizenship”
- Enhance Positive Self Identity and Confidence to Succeed
- Increase Awareness of How Safe Choices can Increase Protective Factors

Committed To: Rebuilding Relationships - Repairing Harm – Problem Solving – Building Capacities –
Accountability – Personal Responsibility – Public Safety
Step 1. Students are scheduled and participate in training to prepare for the Performance of Jury, Bailiff and Clerk Duties.

**Training Objectives (1 – 1.5 Hours)**

- Understand Teen Court Juvenile Justice Diversion (Who, What, Why, When, Where and How)
- Learn and Perform Juror, Bailiff, and Clerk Duties.
- Rules of Law, Court Room Procedures.
- Impact of Crime On Victims and Our Community.
- How to apply Restorative Justice Principles.
- Sign Confidentiality Oath to participate.
- Review Substance Use/Abuse Educational Material Handouts.
- Participate in Mock Hearing.

**Step 2. Perform Peer Jury Duties in Accountability Hearings in Lansing and Mason.**

- Question Victim/Respondent/Parents-Guardians.
  - What Happened? What Harm Was Caused? Who needs to do what to repair Harm?
- Choose and Issue Final Disposition Sanctions. (See Attachment)

**Step 3. Complete Post-Program Questionnaire.**

(See Attachment)

**Step 4. Participate in debriefing exercise to process their experiences.**

Immediately following hearings or scheduled classroom visit.

**Step 5. Receive recognition for Student Teen Court Service.**

**Targeted Program Outcomes:**

- **✓ Reduce Underage Drinking and Use of Other Illegal Drugs**
- **✓ Gain New Law Knowledge and Personal Skills**
- **✓ “Constructive Use of Time” - Engaging in Valued Civic Duty to Help Reduce Juvenile Crime.**
- **✓ Enhance Positive Self Identity and Confidence Through Service Learning**
Increase Awareness of How Safe Choices can Increase Protective Factors and Achieve Success.

Committed To: Rebuilding Relationships – Repairing Harm – Problem Solving – Building Capacities
Accountability – Personal Responsibility – Public Safety
2012-2013 Goals

- Enhance Case Management
- Improve Service Partnerships
- Tracking Software
- Increase Caregiver Education

2011 OUTCOME

✔ 171 First Time Juvenile Offenders Served

Victim: “I never would have believed my friend would ‘crank call’ and then let it get around school. I felt like I was being threatened and bullied for no reason. Teen Court helped me with what happened and gave me a voice in the process.”

Offender: “Teen Court helped me change my attitude about choices. I liked getting the chance to come back after completing my requirements; serving as a Peer Juror made me feel good.”

Caregiver: “The Teen Court Staff were direct with my teen, but kind. When picking my son up from Saturday morning St. Law he would tell me what he learned; it was very helpful.”

Program Outcomes:

✔ Reduce Underage Drinking and Use of Other Illegal Drugs.
✔ Earn Petition Dismissal - do not commit any other Law Violations.
✔ “Constructive Use of Time” - give back through Community Service.
✔ Enhance Positive Self Identity.
✔ Increase Safe Choices and achieve personal success.
“The Teen Court affords students the opportunity to learn about Law, consequences of violating Laws and their service bonds them together to problem solve and gain skills when applying lessons outside of my classroom”. (Joel Lubick)

“The opportunity to apply classroom lessons and critical thinking skills in real life decision making is a great benefit. Asking questions in proceedings and using “teamwork” to determine a Final Disposition was a good, too”. (Vicki Pline.)

2011 OUTCOME
✓ 485 Teens Trained / Peer Jury, Bailiffs, Clerks

2012-2013 Goals
✓ Sustainability
✓ Increase Partnerships
✓ Tracking Software
✓ Advisory Work Group

Program Outcomes:
✓ Reduce Underage Drinking and Use of Other Illegal Drugs
✓ Gain New Law Knowledge and How Courts Function
✓ “Constructive Use of Time” - Engage in Civic Duty.
✓ Enhance Positive Self Identity and Confidence Through Service Learning
✓ Increase Safe Choices / Personal Success.
Dear Ms. Bricklin:

At a time when high stakes testing has made social studies education an afterthought in many schools, youth courts and their school based training programs have provided a powerful means for educating young people about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As President-Elect of the Pennsylvania Social Studies Council, the umbrella organization for social studies educators across the Commonwealth, I am pleased to endorse your efforts to promote youth courts across your city.

The Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies is proud to support youth courts as an educational innovation that provides both a non-traditional means of teaching civics and a discipline alternative to suspensions and expulsions. PCSS joined the Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy under the auspices of Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge and former Pennsylvania First Lady Midge Rendell to promote youth courts beginning back in 2005. Youth court has been featured for the past six years at our annual fall statewide social studies conference and sessions on youth court are already scheduled for our Bethlehem based 2012 event. Our educators have seen firsthand the benefit of breaking the school-to-prison pipeline by empowering young people to take responsibility for their actions and the actions of their peers.

PCSS has celebrated youth court expert Gregg Volz at past conferences for his work organizing and running a series of youth courts in Chester and for his work implementing programs beyond Chester. This coming year, PCSS intends to honor the youth courts at both Kensington Culinary and Bartram High Schools.
Our organization applauds the Philadelphia City Council for its support of youth courts and the social studies education that is a natural part of the program.

Best Wishes!

[Signature]

9038

[Contact Information]

DKT/dt
Dear Ms. Bricklin,

Below is my testimony for the Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council's hearings about Youth Court programs in Philadelphia. I have copied Gregg Volz, who will be testifying.

Thank you,

Andrew Tanzer, Esquire

Dear Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council:

My name is Andrew Tanzer and I am a licensed Pennsylvania attorney. This spring I had the privilege of participating in the training of 25-30 eighth graders to operate a youth court at the Columbus Elementary School in the Chester Upland School district. The training consisted of one class a week. Over those weeks, I watched this class of eighth graders progress to the point where they were able to conduct, without the help or interference of any of the adults in attendance, a full-fledged jury trial of a sixth grader who would have otherwise faced suspension for cutting class. The class mastered the intricate court procedure but more importantly they showed an outstanding level of maturity in handling the substance of the case. The judge, jury, bailiff and youth advocate all performed their duties with the seriousness and depth of understanding of people many years their senior. During the time I worked with these students, I was struck by the increasing level of enthusiasm, confidence and capability the students exhibited. Given the responsibility to make a serious sentencing decision, the students blossomed into mature and thoughtful adults who were easily able to decide on a just and reasonable sentence for the sixth grader before them.

From my observation, in addition to the positive sentencing outcomes, youth court is a powerful teaching tool. The class became more and more energized, enthusiastic and engaged as the weeks went by. The effect of the youth court training and operation even extended to the most troublesome student in the class who, at the end of the final trial, was no longer disruptive but instead offered insightful comments. Moreover, the students learned and demonstrated important adult skills and attributes like articulate public speaking, critical thinking, ability to negotiate, teamwork, problem solving, empathy, and the ability to ask the right questions and listen. In addition, the class got to experience a positive accomplishment and well-earned pride in their accomplishment.

What makes the students’ accomplishment even more remarkable is that these very youthful participants were able to maintain their focus and concentration in a school environment that was too often disruptive, noisy and chaotic.

To anyone who has seen a youth court in action, the benefits to the participants, the student on trial and the rest of the student body are self evident. In these trying economic times, these benefits can be realized at very minimal or no cost to the school district or local government. In the training in which I participated, almost everyone was a volunteer and the classroom teacher was already on payroll. In contrast, the costs of traditional disciplinary procedures are far
greater. They include climate control staff, school resource officers, security, counselors, security equipment, and court costs for expulsion hearings. However, the greatest costs are to the students. The student being disciplined in the traditional model has a far higher risk of future disciplinary problems, lower educational and employment prospects and greater likelihood of incarceration. All of these negative outcomes are an additional cost that the school system and society will bear, and result from a failure to implement a more constructive and effective disciplinary model in the schools like youth court. In addition, a school system that does not offer a youth court alternative to traditional discipline deprives all the students who would participate in the youth court of the positive experience that I witnessed at the Columbus Elementary School.

I thank the City Council for its interest in youth court and for holding this hearing. I strongly urge this Committee to recommend to City Council that it implement a youth court program in the Philadelphia schools. If any member of the Committee or of the City Council has not seen a youth court I strongly recommend that you do so. Seeing youth court in action is the best way to appreciate its power and effect on the students.

--

Andrew Tanzer
Andrew.Tanzer@yahoo.com
610 761-5696
My name is Naudia Williams and I am a rising junior and a member of the Chester Youth Court Volunteers at Swarthmore College. This group was founded by another Swarthmore student, Shilpa Boppana, in 2010 with the aim of strengthening the operation of the youth court in Chester, support the educational development of the students as well as to reinforce social justice values in the school community. I joined the group in January of 2011 and worked with students at the Smedley Allied Health High School in Chester.

When I started the program, I had a cursory understanding of the role that youth court played in decreasing the likelihood of students having contact with the criminal justice system. I imagined that I was going to help students to run a youth court; I did not fathom the depth of the educational value of the program until I witnessed firsthand its transformative impact on the students.

When we started working with the students at Smedley, they were reticent to engage with us as we attempted to bring what we thought were fun and stimulating lesson plans. These lesson plans were developed in order to improve the students’ public speaking, critical thinking, questioning and deliberation skills. They expressed much anxiety when they were asked to present in front of the class or to answer a question out loud. There were instances where we were very discouraged about their lack of enthusiasm but as the weeks progressed, we began to see visible growth in the students. They became more engaged and confident and most importantly, they were taking ownership of and pride in their roles as youth court members.

The presence of Youth Court in schools puts accountability and civic responsibility in the hands of young people who are often denied of taking control of many aspects of their lives. I have seen students participate in animated discussions at 7:30 in the morning. One of the most compelling examples that I can recall of this active participation was during a lesson plan that the CYCV implemented with the aim of allowing the students to come up with their own mission statement. The Smedley students not only came up with several ideas that reflected their own values but they were able to work together to produce a coherent mission statement in one session. As we began to acknowledge the students’ autonomy and the value of their own creative ideas, we began to see consistent progress in the manner in which they operated their hearings. We supported and challenged them and they in turn challenged us and demonstrated to their peers and to themselves their individual and collective competence in running a youth court.

My intention is not to use this forum to praise the work that Swarthmore’s CYCV did and continue to do in these high schools in Chester. However, I have no doubt that college students have a very critical role to play in this program. We provide the manpower, the enthusiasm and the skill set to train students for youth court, serve as role models and provide an alternative to the school to prison pipeline with what we advocate and represent: the high school to college.
bridge. We are also large base that does not need to be paid and are concerned about social and restorative justice.

I have no illusions that Youth Court is the panacea for the crisis facing the young people of this city and of this state. However, I am convinced that youth court is a valuable and necessary alternative to the punitive disciplinary system in school. That the program is student-run, facilitates student empowerment, reinforces democratic principles and advocates restorative justice speaks to the quality and range of youth court. I applaud the City Council for its interest in youth courts and I implore its members to consider the value of extending this program.
June 12, 2012

To the Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council:

My name is Kerriann Laubach, a rising senior at Washington and Lee University majoring in Biology and Environmental Studies with a minor in Poverty and Human Capability Studies. I hope to attend law school and eventually practice environmental law. From 2007-2009, I served on the Washington County Juvenile Justice System Peer Jury in the Pittsburgh area. The jury was comprised of nine students from three different county schools. This summer, I am working as an intern with Chester Youth Courts under Gregory Volz through the Shepherd Higher Education Consortium on Poverty.

The Washington County Peer Jury works through the juvenile probation office and is set up differently than the Youth Courts in this area, although it is also a sentencing body and follows the same principles of restorative justice, admitted guilt, and peer interaction. Instead of a formal court proceeding, with student jurors and a student judge, bailiff, clerk, and defense attorney, ours is made of jurors only with supervision from a juvenile probation office employee. A jury foreperson – who leads proceedings, reads the police report, and explains peer jury to the respondent – is selected and the respondent and guardian are brought in for questioning. Any juror can ask questions with the probation office employee interjecting as needed (which was fairly rare). After questioning, the respondent is drug tested and the jury deliberates. We use the same sanctions as Chester Youth Courts in developing the disposition. After agreeing to the disposition, the respondent follows up with the probation office. Similarly to the program in Chester, if the respondent fails to complete the disposition in the allotted time, he or she is referred back to the probation office for conventional handling of the case.

The primary lesson that I took from Peer Jury was the shaping impact of peer pressure on youths. Almost every case we heard was a situation where the respondent had “fallen into the wrong crowd” and been arrested partly as a result of friends’ actions. In these types of cases, youth courts (in whatever form) are particularly powerful instruments because they combat negative peer pressure with positive peer pressure. Respondents are introduced to a group of peers who offer constructive guidance on restorative justice. The respondent then begins to identify how peer pressure and bad situations have shaped his or her decisions. Such advice as “stay away from that group of friends” is far more powerful from a group of peers than from an adult.

A youth court can be both more and less intimidating than conventional juvenile justice procedures. Peer disapproval can be more poignant than lectures from adults, but peers are also better able to empathize with the triggers and mediating factors behind the incident, particularly if it occurred in a challenging school environment. This combination of empathy and social admonishment often causes the respondent to critically consider his or her actions in the context of the broader society. Youth court allows the respondent to consider both the triggers and consequences of bad decisions.

Personally, I learned empathy, public speaking, leadership, and impartiality from Peer Jury. By being a part of the justice system, I better understand laws, rules, discipline, and the legal process. Peer Jury taught me critical thinking skills and how to see all sides in a conflict (the respondent, victim(s), parents, school, community, etc.). I also learned how to discern useful information and
weight evidence. Most (if not all) of these skills are transferrable even if I do not decide to go into a legal field.

I admire the support of the Philadelphia City Council for youth courts in the area (particularly in devastated communities like Chester), and I look forward to the expansion of these types of programs throughout the state and the nation. In my experience, youth courts have exceptional value as a part of both educational and adjudication systems. In communities lacking in these areas, youth courts can begin to fill the gaps and halt the “school-to-prison” pipeline. Using volunteer college and law students (particularly those interested in education, poverty, social justice, or juvenile justice) can minimize expenses while training and running youth courts. Programs could be developed through service-learning courses or volunteer internships in a variety of fields. Even in this time of tight resources, youth courts should get priority as a cost-effective program with the potential to change the lives of a vast number of students.
June 18, 2012

Philadelphia City Council
Office of Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr.
Room 404 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Re: Youth Court

Dear Councilman Jones:

Last year I read an article in the PA Bar magazine about youth courts and immediately got in touch with Gregg Volz. I am a semi-retired attorney who is interested in pro bono opportunities particularly those involving youths. As a society in general and here in PA particularly, I believe we are completely squandering our future human capital. This failure to invest in our future is extremely short sighted and disturbing.

Since I first contacted Gregg I have had several opportunities to interact with the youth court participants in the Chester Upland School District and I am beyond impressed with their dedication. I understand that data is currently being collected to substantiate the effectiveness of youth court, but you only have to observe these young people to know that this activity has an important effect on them and their future. I have long thought that we need to intervene early with young people who are having problems so that we can show them there are alternatives. Youth court does just that and I hope that it will become a statewide program with the support it deserves.

Sincerely,

Joan A. Tarka

cc: Gregg Volz, via e-mail
To: The Public Safety Committee of the City Council of Philadelphia

Thank you for raising the level of public awareness of a relatively simple, costs-effective means of addressing a growing gap in our society’s defense system. Youth and adolescents who do not understand and appreciate the purpose and function of the Rule of Law are endangering the foundation of our democratic society.

The problem is not that we are required to build more prisons; the problem is that the human capital of the country is eroding. A youth court, designed to address the maturational level of the respondents who are assigned to it (i.e.: purposefully taking into account the different requirements for middle and high school students) can assist those youth and/or adolescents to change their behavior and assume personal responsibility for what they do.

School-based youth courts, such as the ones found in the Chester Upland School District, have demonstrated that the process and requirements of the court can have a powerful, positive impact of the attitudes and behavior of both respondents and students who administer the court and its proceedings.

I support, without reservation, the cutting edge work that the Philadelphia City Council has undertaken. If I can be of assistance in furthering the cause of school-based youth courts in the Philadelphia area, I would be pleased to do so. I can be reached at (412) 835-1434.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the public court hearings of the Public Safety Committee.

Kathryn S. Atman, Ph. D.
Associate Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh
Director, Southwestern Pennsylvania Youth Court Initiative
Dear members of the Public Safety Committee:

I am pleased to see that the City Council has made a decision to investigate the viability of a Youth Court or Courts to address both in-school disciplinary issues and possible delinquency issues outside of the schools. I have had the great pleasure to be involved with the Chester-Upoland School District on a volunteer basis for the past several years and have seen the impact that a functioning youth court can have upon the students as well as the school and residential community to which they belong.

I am a semi-retired attorney in Delaware County and for several years, I chaired the Delaware County Bar Association’s Community Outreach Committee and through that committee, I became involved with the Youth Court in Chester. Prior to my involvement with Youth Court, I had volunteered my time with after-school tutorial and homework assistance programs in some of the local churches in Chester, so I have always had a desire to help those students. My work with the Youth Court program was primarily as a part time instructor for 5th and 8th grade classes in the 2010-2011 school year and kindergarten and 8th grade classes in the 2011-2012 school year although, I also spent some time with the high school students during both school years. I was particularly pleased this year to participate in the high school youth court’s handling of an actual delinquency matter in the Delaware County Courthouse. The case involved a fight on school grounds when school was not in session; two young men were charged with delinquency by reason of disorderly conduct, simple and aggravated assault. Previously, the Youth Court had handled only school based disciplinary matters so this was a completely new experience for everyone; it required that the jurors be made aware of the state statutes describing the offenses and lengthy questioning and deliberations and discussions that resulted in a determination that was well received by the District Attorney as well as the two young men and their parents. I had the good fortune to be present during the deliberations to answer specific questions regarding the offenses and was privy to the discussions that resulted in the determination. The discussions were very mature and the determination (which was different for the two young men involved) was very well reasoned by the jurors.

I have witnessed a good many actual hearings involving school related matters and was pleased to see the 8th grade class sufficiently instructed so as to ably handle a suspension matter before the end of the school year. I think it important to note that, as respects that matter, this was the first time that the 8th grade had actually sat as a Youth Court and thus, the student who appeared was very anxious and rather reluctant to proceed but the judge took it upon himself to tell her that he and the jurors were as nervous as she was and they wanted to help her. That simple comment resulted in the student opening up in response to the questions posed to her and resulted in a fair and well accepted determination and the applause of all of the rest of the class that was not actively involved in the hearing. I took that applause to be in appreciation not only for what the Youth Court had accomplished but also for the willingness of the Respondent to appear and participate. A very mature response from a group of students that, on occasion, had been reluctant learners but were polite and appreciative listeners during the hearing.
I suspect you raised your eyebrows when I mentioned kindergarten earlier; it just goes to show the power of this educational tool. I participated in a reading program offered by the Delaware County Bar Association at the Columbus Elementary School and ended up reading to a kindergarten class. I returned again and during that time, one of the students was engaged in poking a student sitting next to her, I stopped reading and spoke with the students about the proper use of hands (not for hitting) and the students became very engaged in the discussion. In later meetings we discussed how a disorderly student disrupts everyone and is unfair and hurtful. As the year progressed, the students usually sat quietly, and those that did not were occasionally reprimanded by their peers, something I consider to be a major accomplishment at that young age and evidence of what positive peer oversight can bring to a community.

I believe that a successful Youth Court program requires cooperation and involvement by the legal, educational and social work/child psychology professions. As an attorney, I was able to discuss evidence, open ended questions, the role of the court, the reason for laws and the like. Educational professionals need to be there to fill in the gaps, continue the discussions and guide the volunteers with a given class. Social workers or child psychologists are important components to assist with the teenage mind and behavior issues. But ultimately, it all comes down to the students themselves and their individual desires to be a positive force in their communities. Youth Court programs offer them that opportunity and I encourage the Philadelphia City Council to give serious consideration towards development of a Youth Court as experience in Chester shows that it does have a positive effect upon everyone involved.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted:

David G. Blake
Testimony before the Philadelphia City Council Committee on Public Safety
Eva Gold, Ph.D. and Michael Norton, Research for Action
June 19, 2012

Thank you to members of City Council for allowing us to discuss our research on Youth Courts in the Chester Upland School District (CUSD). My name is Michael Norton and I am a Research Associate at Research for Action, and I am joined by my co-team leader on the Chester Youth Court research project, Eva Gold, a Senior Research Fellow at Research for Action. Today, we will review the context in which Youth Courts operate in Chester, our research on Youth Courts, and preliminary findings.

As you may know, CUSD endured a 40 percent budget cut over the summer of 2011. Last fall, the back-to-school period at CUSD created significant uncertainty surrounding the viability of the learning environment and the Youth Courts as well. Every teacher or administrator involved in the Youth Courts was either reassigned or laid off entering the 2011-12 school year. Executive level administrators were replaced, and students walked out of class and marched on CUSD central offices in protest of overflowing class sizes and lack of materials.

Despite these considerable challenges, the consistent advocacy of two school leaders and the persistence of actively involved students who worked with Mr. Gregg Volz and other supporters of school-based youth courts reconvened the CUSD Youth Courts by mid-October 2011. In the midst of ongoing district-wide uncertainty, Chester-Upland’s students and staff forged ahead with their Youth Court hearings, and in doing so, provided a potential model for moving school policies away from punitive, zero tolerance disciplinary practices.

Like many other urban school districts operating within a context of financial distress, high truancy, and behavioral problems, the school climate in CUSD high schools has presented an ongoing challenge to teaching and learning. In recent decades, the response to situations like Chester’s has been the institution of zero tolerance policies. Zero tolerance policies assume that strict enforcement of disciplinary policies, along with quick and severe punishment for even small infractions, discourages minor offenses and more serious anti-social behaviors. After two decades, however, the success of this approach is not convincing (American Psychological Association, 2008). Research on more graduated approaches to school discipline has found persistent racial disparities in the suspension and expulsion of students under zero tolerance models (Skiba, Horner, Choong-Geun, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011). As a result, there is increasing consideration of alternative approaches to traditional disciplinary policies.

In operation since 2007-08, the CUSD Youth Courts represent an alternative behavioral model that holds the potential to be replicated across urban districts facing similar challenges. Youth Courts in Chester provide students who choose a hearing with peers as judge and jury can avoid direct suspension. School climate managers make the Youth Court option available to students on a case-by-case basis, targeting those students most likely to benefit from the experience. After admitting wrong-doing, students participate in a peer-to-peer hearing that provides them with the opportunity to present their
account of the offense and to discuss alternative ways of negotiating the situation that led to their offense. At the conclusion of each hearing, the Youth Court issues a disposition for the student that can range from a formal apology to the aggrieved, reflective writing about how their behavior was detrimental to the school community, or community service.

With the support of the Stoneleigh Foundation, Research for Action has been studying Youth Courts in Chester for nearly a year. Our 16-month study focuses on four broad questions including:

1) What are the key components that constitute a high-functioning Youth Court?
2) Who participates in the CUSD’s school-based Youth Courts?
3) What effect does Youth Court participation have on student engagement, attendance, and behavior?
4) What effect does Youth Court participation have on students’ academic performance?

To address these questions, our data collection has included CUSD administrative records, a student survey administered at both Chester high schools, observations of Youth Court proceedings and interviews with key staff and administrators supporting Youth Courts in Chester. Our analyses will develop profiles of students who participate in Youth Courts, and will assess the effect that Youth Court participation has on students’ engagement, behavior, and academic performance. These findings will be further contextualized with our analysis of the observations and interviews conducted throughout the course of the year.

At this early stage, our preliminary findings suggest that student respondents’ behavior is often positively affected by their involvement in the Youth Court process. Adults involved with the program perceive it to be especially successful in deterring youth on the “fringe;” that is, those students not yet set on a pathway of gangs and drugs, from serious negative behaviors. Many of the most involved adults believe that the Youth Court experience is powerful because it provides a “positive experience with wrongdoing” for the respondents. Youth involved with the Youth Courts believe that the experience can help restore a sense of having a future.

Student volunteers who participated in youth courts saw a benefit in their development of connections to professionals—lawyers, judges and others—who they might otherwise never have had the opportunity to meet. The youth saw these connections as important “resources” they might call on in the future. While their adult mentors talked about how participation in Youth Court contributed to improving academic skills, such as practice in following a complex argument and being able to “speak on your feet,” the students commented that being part of the Court means serving as an example—academically and socially—for their peers. Youth Court members reported an increased sense of accountability to one another as well as a sense of being able to help others and their school community. Finally, adults and students believed youth court contributed to an improved school climate because it reduced the number of suspensions, and helped to promote a positive image of the school in the local community.

Currently, Research for Action is proceeding with a full analysis of all the historical Youth Court records, along with the data collected during the 2011-12 academic year, to assess the relationship between Youth Court participation and student academic performance, engagement, attendance and behavior. While it is premature to draw conclusions from these data at this stage, with the permission of the Stoneleigh Foundation, we would be more than happy to share our findings when they are complete.
As we stated earlier, the Chester Upland School District is in financial distress, and there is very real concern about the future of the school district and the students who attend its schools. However, during our observations and interviews we continued to see optimism about the Youth Courts in Chester. Many adults have expressed hope that Youth Courts will continue in Chester and expand state-wide and nationally. In sum, there is a general sense by key players in Chester that Youth Courts are empowering, a potent learning opportunity, and promote restorative justice, all of which both adults and youth appreciate.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our work with Council today.
June 18, 2012

City of Philadelphia
City Council
Public Safety Committee
Att: Shoshana Bricklin

Dear Members of the Committee:

As the nation’s longest serving coordinator of a Teen/Youth Court program it is my
distinct honor to submit this testimony to express my support for the initiatives
undertaken by leaders in the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania whose mission is the development of youth courts in your diverse and vital
communities.

When I became the Executive Director of Florida’s first Teen Court in Sarasota County
in 1989 there were an estimated fifty teen/youth court programs in the United States.
Since that time I have personally witnessed the expansion of the peer jury concept across
America. The notion of young people participating in a formalized sentencing process
and the values of such programs has now been widely researched, documented, and
recognized. It is now acknowledged that teen/youth courts are a productive, cost-effective
way to intervene in early delinquency. As the years have gone by what also has been
proven is that these courts, rather than simply handing down punishment, provide
activities where young actively participate in the resolution of a problem—the reduction of
juvenile crime. All the while, the youthful participants learn the benefits of law abiding
citizenship when they become civically engaged.

Teen/Youth courts are proven alternatives for early offending youth who are given the
chance to be held accountable through sanctions that are rehabilitative and restorative by
the very nature of how the system works. Students learn, first hand, the way our court
system works by actively taking on the role of prosecuting and defense attorneys, clerks,
theft, jurors under the supervision of adult judges and attorneys. Exposure to various
careers in the legal field and positive peer and adult role models inspires and motivates
young people to pursue work in professions they might never have considered without
their exposure through teen/youth court. I attach an article supporting a positive of just
one example of how our program and one young man has benefitted from our services
locally. There are thousands of similar stories unfolding across America regularly.

As the first President of both the Florida Association of Teen Courts, Inc. and National
Association of Youth Courts, Inc. I have been honored to assist many communities of all
sizes and socio-economic makeup that have developed this innovative concept while witnessing the transformational outcomes for schools, towns, cities that support the implementation of the services. That said, it is so many people, not just the at-risk youth and student volunteers, but adult judges, lawyers, and educators who become involved that benefit from the multi-faceted program.

I have long known of the desire of citizens throughout Pennsylvania to implement Teen/Youth Courts throughout your state. I am confident that both the City of Philadelphia and the leaders responsible for the development of youth related services young people who will become involved stand to benefit from the cost savings that will be provided by reducing cases needing traditional court services and through early intervention and educational that will reduce overall crime in your community.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this information and for your efforts as advocates for youth related activities that can potentially transform your community. If I can provide any further information please feel free to contact me at my office in Sarasota, Florida, 941-861-8467 or my email, fatc@verizon.net.

Sincerely,

M. Kathleen Self
Executive Director
My name is Stefan Campagna. As a recent graduate of law school, I have chosen a bit of a different career path than the majority of my fellow classmates. My current goal and intended career is one that will allow me to stay involved with, and eventually run, a Teen Court program. While it might sound cliché, it was not I who chose the public interest field of legal work; the public interest field really did choose me. While I recently walked across the stage to receive my Juris Doctorate along with approximately two hundred other students in my class, my journey into law school did not follow the path of my fellow graduates. Up until the age of sixteen, I did not have much interest in the law. The idea of being an attorney might have darted into my mind a few times, but it left just as quickly. I was more of an aimless kid than I was an aspiring professional. This began to change during the fall of 2002, when I had my first real experience with the legal system.

At the age of sixteen, I was arrested for numerous charges, including burglary and theft charges in the double digits. Since some of these charges were felonies, I faced the daunting possibility of serving time in a juvenile detention center and having a permanently tarnished record. At my arraignment, I was offered the chance to take part in a pre-trial diversion program called Teen Court. I accepted this offer, and my experience with the Sarasota Teen Court has forever changed my life. Teen Court provided counseling that allowed me to step back and evaluate my life and where it was heading. After completing the program, my charges were dropped and cleared from my record. It was then that I told myself that I would be back in the legal system, but as an advocate.

Upon completion of the Teen Court program, which consisted of community service and volunteer time in the program as a member of the jury in future hearings, I graduated high school and earned a scholarship to attend college and, eventually, law school. While in college, I began visiting Teen Court and speaking to children who were currently in the program. My words to them were always different, but my message was always the same: having gotten into trouble does not define you; instead, you are defined by what you do with this opportunity given to you. Every time I spoke to these children who were in the same position as I had been, I was reminded of the opportunity that had been given to me. I was reminded that Teen Court had literally given me a second chance.

These informal discussions with the kids eventually led to my speaking on behalf of youth courts throughout the state of Florida and, over the past 3 years, the state of New York. Over the past year or so, I have spoken at the ABA mid-year conference in Atlanta on a panel in support of youth courts throughout the nation and spoken in Washington D.C. on behalf of youth courts nationally. In fact, I have even had the good fortune of sharing a stage with Mr. Jack Levine, the Honorable Judge Sullivan, and the woman who first admitted me into her Teen Court, Katie Self. In each of these speeches, my main focus has always been the restorative justice function of youth courts, especially the installation of civic responsibility into these young respondents. A year ago, I aided in the establishment of the Nassau County Youth Court, which has now heard over 175 cases and has become one of the flagship programs in the state of New York.
The point of this testimony is that, while we all have our own paths in life, mine was carved out by my experiences in Teen Court. I was given a second chance in my life thanks to the Teen Court program in Sarasota, along with a sense of duty and civic responsibility that has allowed me to pursue a career in the legal field. Teen Court has effectively allowed me to come full circle, and give back to those who are in a predicament similar to my past experience. Over the past eight years, I have been a juvenile defendant, a youth counselor, a law student, a public speaker and advocate of youth courts, and a co-founder and director of a new youth court. As long as teen courts continue to exist and grow in our communities throughout the country, juveniles will receive the opportunity to better themselves and their community. Simply put, teen courts are needed to benefit the youths of this country.
Dear Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council - my name is Shilpa Boppana and from January 2010 to May 2011, I was a founder and coordinator of the Chester Youth Court Volunteers (CYCV), a student group at Swarthmore College that worked with students in the city of Chester, Pennsylvania. Our mission was to contribute to the students' educational development, improve the functioning of the youth court program, and positively impact the broader school environment. As we worked with high-school students involved with youth court, we recognized the importance of youth court programs in fighting the "school-to-prison pipeline," empowering students to make positive changes in their school and community, and equipping them with skills that are crucial for success in high-school, college, and beyond.

Our group of college students worked with high-school students at Smedley Allied Health High School in Chester. We created and implemented lesson plans aimed at improving the students' public speaking, critical thinking, analytical, teamwork, and problem solving skills - all abilities that are vital to the smooth functioning of a youth court and essential for academic success. We worked closely with students, particularly those who were shy, had low self-confidence, or were unaccustomed to participating in class.

At the end of the year, we observed that students' public speaking, critical thinking, analytical, teamwork, and problem solving skills has improved significantly. Both Greg Volz, founder of the youth court programs in Chester, and Justin Sheppard, the youth court teacher, agreed that our work improved the students' performance in youth court. At the end of the school year, the students were much more poised, carefully outspoken, better prepared to give persuasive speeches, and better able to thoughtfully question the respondent during youth court hearings.

From September 2009, when many of the students barely had the courage to speak in front of one another and had little knowledge about youth court, their transformation to the end of April was tremendous. Each student seemed to be more confident of their abilities to contribute positively to youth court. The students also increased their overall understanding of the purpose, values, and goals of Youth Court, and the importance of their participation for their school and community.

I commend the City Council for recognizing the importance of youth courts and their interest in creating youth courts in Philadelphia schools. I strongly believe that youth court programs will positively impact Philadelphia youth who come before the youth courts for disciplinary issues and the students who staff the youth court. In this age of slashed budgets and financial concerns, youth courts are a cost-effective way for engage young people in schools and to end the "school-to-prison" pipeline. University students are an untapped resource that should be connected with youth courts to help students build-skills, and I urge the City Council to consider the benefits of partnerships between Philadelphia universities and youth court programs."

Thank you,

Shilpa Boppana
In the fall of 2011, I, along with another student, began teaching lessons to students at Bartram High School about restorative justice and how to run their own youth courts, including lessons on jury questioning, restorative dispositions, and client advocacy. We each taught once a week during a class period, and thereby students were able to receive lessons on youth court almost every day, with the classroom teacher’s supplemental lessons. Unfortunately, due to logistical concerns, we were unable to continue teaching there, but I started a program at another area school, Sayre High School.

I taught lessons once per week for 8 weeks to students after school. These students were in the program voluntarily, and genuinely interested in changing the culture of their school - most recently given a spot on the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s list of “persistently dangerous schools” for 2011-2012. Because of their families’ income level, these teenagers are at a higher risk of becoming involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Youth Courts gives them an outlet for their anger and enables them to be involved in a program relevant to their daily lives. Many times the students would stay after the program and talk with me and the supervising teacher about problems they are experiencing and how they were using youth courts and the ideals of restorative justice to solve those problems. They are more confident in handling peer disputes without feeling the need to report to an authority figure. This is especially helpful in schools where “snitching” is seriously frowned upon.

Additionally, these students gain valuable skills – critical thinking, public speaking, and leadership skills. When the lessons began, only one student would consistently speak. By the end, everyone was willing to take on every role in mock hearings, and the girl who was formerly the quietest was selected by her peers to be the judge. By the end of my lessons, the students were running their own mock hearings, but because it was nearing the end of the school year, we were unable to have actual hearings. The students are excited to recruit more students at the beginning of the next school year, and teach these lessons with the help of law student volunteers.

I believe that law student volunteers are a largely untapped resource for high school youth courts. At Penn, and at other area law schools, the students have a mandatory pro bono requirement. They must engage in law-related services to the community as a requirement for graduation. Teaching at Bartram and Sayre was a rewarding and fun way to fulfill that requirement, and far better than many research-based alternatives. Youth courts forces law students out of the classroom and into the Philadelphia public schools, where students are disproportionately from low-income families. By working with these youth, law students will begin to grasp how complex issues of public school funding, poverty, and race work to perpetuate inequality. With this understanding, law students can communicate these complexities to other law students, lawyers, and laypeople. Law students can serve as a communications conduit between their own world of opportunity and a world of uncertainty, which is instrumental to prepare law students pursuing a career in direct service or public interest law, professionally or through pro bono work. This program can help bring students –law students and Philadelphia public school students – from diverse backgrounds together into a program that will benefit their shared community.

Rachel Miller
JD, 2012
University of Pennsylvania Law School
June 18, 2012

Dear Public Safety Committee of the City Council of Philadelphia:

Youth Court at John Bartram High School has provided our students with valuable learning experiences as well as with opportunities for them to develop as citizens. Continued participation in Youth Court will surely support their growth as positive members of their communities.

As you are aware, John Bartram High School is located in South West Philadelphia, a neighborhood long beset with social-economic adversity. Our student body reflects the composition of the area, both the strengths and the challenges. Some of our most challenged and challenging students are members of the Youth Court. They are, unfortunately, very familiar with the receiving end of the criminal justice system. Youth Court has, however, provided them with the opportunity to participate in areas of the legal process with which they have previously been unfamiliar. Consequently, their growth in this short amount of time that the program has operated here has been impressive. They are beginning to appreciate how individual behaviors on the part of a student can impact, in both negative and positive ways, a larger body, in this case, our school. Participation in Youth Court, has required these students to apply critical and analytical thinking skills, public speaking skills and the ability to articulate abstract concepts. They've had to develop team-working skills to build consensus, thereby increasing their confidence in their ability to set achieve goals. Approximately 85% of the students involved in Youth Court comprise our most challenging population; students who are usually on the consequence end are now working through positive consequences to support a positive, safe learning environment.

The benefits to the school as a whole are similarly promising. We are experiencing a reduced number of Level 1 infractions, as identified in the School District of Philadelphia Code of Student Conduct, infractions including disruptive behaviors, interpersonal conflicts, and repeated violations of behaviors that interfere with the business of teaching and learning. These shifts to more positive behaviors have lead to fewer parent-climate staff meetings regarding inappropriate conduct. Students who have committed infractions often choose to participate in a trial by their peers, a space where they feel they have more of a voice. While this leads to a decrease in out of school suspensions, obviously beneficial to all, more importantly, Youth Court encourages reflective practice instead of reactive practices. Students must take responsibility for their actions and face all relevant parties.

This year, Youth Court has benefited all participants. With funding, we wish to grow the program to expose students to all aspects of the criminal justice system and the connections between the neighborhood and the members of the criminal justice system. In this way, they can become empowered to create in their neighborhoods the same positive changes they created in John Bartram High School.

Anthony Singleton
The Center for Court Innovation submits these comments regarding youth courts and their value as a diversion program to the Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council in order to assist the Committee as it considers an expanded role for youth courts in Philadelphia. The Center for Court Innovation is a public/private partnership between the New York State Unified Court System and the Fund for the City of New York that is devoted to reducing crime, assisting victims, and improving public confidence in the justice system. We accomplish these tasks through research, technical assistance, and through our demonstration projects, many of which focus on juvenile justice. Youth courts have become an important part of our efforts to keep young people from becoming more deeply involved in the justice system. In addition to running programs ourselves, we provide technical assistance to new and existing youth courts locally, nationally and internationally.

The Center for Court Innovation opened its first youth court, in Red Hook, Brooklyn 14 years ago. Since opening that program, the Center has opened and now operates five more neighborhood youth court programs in New York City and one program in Newark, New Jersey. The Center has, as well, published a number of best practice guides and tools for youth courts, and have hosted two statewide conferences for practitioners. For the Center, youth courts represent an opportunity to intervene at a critical moment in a young person’s life. Through youth court, young people have the opportunity to be accountable for their actions, and to make amends, while avoiding legal consequences and gaining skills to stay out of the justice system in the future.

A brief primer on youth courts: Youth courts are tribunals of young people who have been trained to hear actual cases of offenses committed by their peers. The Center uses and advocates for a peer jury model grounded in restorative justice: the courts provide a youth-led, non-adversarial process to help young people understand the harm their actions have caused to others, the larger community, and themselves; take steps to repair that harm; and learn to make better decisions going forward. In contrast to the experience of family court or criminal court, youth courts reinforce membership in the community and assume that all young people have the potential to make a valuable contribution, and that peer pressure can be positive. Typical cases involve petty larceny, theft of service (fare beating), assault, marijuana possession, vandalism and trespass. Cases are referred by juvenile and criminal justice agencies, in lieu of prosecution, and by schools. Sanctions may include community service, letters of apology or other written reflections, or attending a skill building workshops on topics such as decision-making, goal setting and responding to conflict.

A measure of the impact, and potential impact, of youth courts can be found in our statistics. In 2011, we operated five youth courts in New York City for the full year, opening a sixth New York program in May, 2011. Those courts held a total of 692 hearings. Of those, 92% were successfully closed: that means that 92% of those respondents completed the sanctions
assigned to them by their peers. In the first five months of 2012, after opening an additional neighborhood program, our courts have heard 423 cases, 93% of which have already been successfully closed. These high rates compare positively to diversion programs run by adults and confirm the basic premise of youth court: that young people respect the process and that that they will often listen to their peers in a way that they don’t to adult authority figures. In addition, youth court respondents and members completed over 4000 hours of community service in 2011, planting trees, serving at soup kitchens, bagging groceries for food pantries, painting murals, cleaning up graffiti, helping out at public events; almost half of those hours were accomplished by youth court members, who often volunteer alongside respondents in addition participating in hearings.

Each of these cases represents not only an opportunity for a young person to learn from missteps and move forward without a trip to family court or gaining a juvenile or criminal record but they also represent a substantial saving of resources. Of those 692 cases heard in 2011, the largest percentage, 52%, were referred by New York City’s Department of Probation, as a method of adjusting cases—diverting them before a family court petition is filed—or responding to a violation of probation. We also are getting an increasing number of referrals from the Law Department, the prosecutor in New York City’s Family Court, which diverts cases that Probation could not adjust, in lieu of filing a petition. The Police Department also provides a significant source of referrals to some of our programs, as do individual schools, which refer school disciplinary cases that would otherwise result in suspension.

In one of our courts, the majority of cases are for 16 and 17 year-olds, referred for diversion by the criminal court, because the age of criminal responsibility in New York is 16; the court adjourns their cases in contemplation of dismissal, with the condition that they appear before the youth court and successfully complete any assigned sanctions. The success of this program suggests the value of youth court as a diversion for older youth, potentially with more extensive juvenile court backgrounds.

For the past year, the Center for Court Innovation has been working with New York City high schools to create school-based youth courts as alternatives to suspension. New York City has some of the highest suspension rates in the country, and there is a well-established connection between school suspension and subsequent involvement in the justice system. Youth courts have great potential to keep students in school and engaged instead being pushed out. Early results are promising; in one high school in Brooklyn, the youth court has heard 37 cases since January, all of which would have otherwise resulted in suspension. Instead those students have written letters of apology, partnered with teachers on projects for the benefit of the school, or received tutoring, guidance assistance, or mediation. All but 2 of those cases – 95% -- were successfully closed.

In addition to providing a diversion alternative for youth court respondents, youth courts also serve as a leadership and civic engagement program for youth court members; in the Center’s programs, an important subgroup of those members started out as respondents and then participated in the 8 week youth court training program. The curriculum teaches restorative justice as well as skills like active listening, critical thinking, public speaking and collaborative decision-making. At the end of the training, participants must take a “bar exam,” which tests their understanding of the concepts and readiness to assume the responsibility of youth court. The training makes possible the experiential learning of the court process itself, which builds
competency and leadership in a real world setting.

The Center for Court Innovation believes strongly in the potential of well-run, restorative justice-oriented youth courts to serve the dual roles of diversion and leadership development for young people. While there is at present only a limited amount of robust research documenting the impact of youth courts, the Center is committed to increasing the evidence base for the model. This summer, we will convene a privately funded roundtable for a small group of researchers and funders which will help develop a comprehensive research agenda, which we will disseminate nationally.

We would be happy to answer any questions the Committee has on the implementation of youth courts, and are available to provide technical assistance to non-governmental organizations as well as schools and city agencies interested in building a network of youth courts for the City of Philadelphia.

For more information:

Email: Youthcourts@courtinnovation.org or fishmann@courtinnovation.org

Visit: www.youthcourts.org and www.courtinnovation.org

Phone: (646) 386-5920
June 19, 2012

Philadelphia City Council
City Hall, Room 494
District Office 313
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3290

Re: Youth Courts

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL (shoshana.bricklin@phila.gov)

Dear Public Safety Committee of the Philadelphia City Council:

My name is Bill Higgins and I am the District Attorney for Bedford County. I grew up in the Philadelphia area, attended Cardinal Dougherty High School, and graduated from Villanova University and Widener Law School. In my functions for the citizens of Bedford County I am authorized to both prosecute lawbreakers and support programs that prevent future lawbreaking. I view youth courts as an enormously powerful preventative and intervention tool. If implemented correctly, youth courts can help young offenders repair the harm their actions caused and develop competencies to avoid recidivism. Youth courts are consistent with the PA Juvenile Code which calls for balanced and restorative justice.

Let me congratulate the Philadelphia City Council for holding these hearings. Five years ago I spoke at a children's conference in Harrisburg about my support for teen courts or peer justice courts. I am pleased that my talk at that conference inspired others in this part of the state to develop youth courts. I have watched the development of youth courts in places like Chester with great interest and have been pleased that other law enforcement organizations statewide are either promoting youth courts or trying to learn more about them.

It is in vein that these hearings will have ripples throughout the commonwealth. In an age of diminished public resources, youth courts afford us an alternative to punitive and expensive programs we can no longer afford. The power of youth courts rests on the positive peer pressure that they exert. Recent brain research tells us that the adolescent brain does not fully mature until the early 20s. Most youthful offenders are not hardened criminals set in their ways but rather children who are still amenable to change. Our traditional models of juvenile justice often put youthful offenders into situations where they are exposed to negative peer models. Youth court gives the youthful offender very
different options. There is also significant benefit for the young people serving on
the youth court. At a time when civic education has been driven from our schools
by the force of high stakes testing, youth participating on youth courts learn the
values of being involved in our great democracy. That a better disciplinary
system, whether in a school-based or community youth court, can also provide
academic, civic engagement and socialization skills to the youth who run the
court is a major consideration for anyone trying to develop public policy that is
positive and multifaceted. Youth courts allow students to gain self-esteem, think
critically, contribute to their environment, and develop their public speaking
skills. These are lifelong skills.

I have been advised that Pennsylvania has only eight (8) juvenile justice
based youth courts. New York has over one hundred (100). Similar disparity
exists among school based courts. It behooves us to ask why our neighbor to the
north believes youth courts are a better tool to deal with errant youth than
practices we first developed when our understanding of the human brain was less
informed.

Again, let me emphasize that what is decided here by you will have a major
impact on what other juvenile justice and school systems decide to do. You have a
chance to not only help youth in Philadelphia—but throughout this great
commonwealth.

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony.

Sincerely,

William J. Higgins, Jr.
District Attorney

WJH/slw
June 19, 2012

Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr.
Chair, Public Safety Committee
City Hall, Room 404
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Re: Youth Court

Dear Councilman Jones:

I am writing on behalf of the membership of the Philadelphia Bar Association to commend Philadelphia City Council for considering the issue of Youth Court. As an alternative to incarceration and as a program that emphasizes positive outcomes, family involvement and community improvement, Youth Court is worthy of your study and consideration.

The Philadelphia Bar Association's Legal Rights of Children Committee and Criminal Justice Section are taking a look at Youth Court, and it is anticipated that they will make a presentation to this Association's Board of Governors on the matter later this summer. We will keep you informed regarding our consideration of this issue.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

John Savoth
Chancellor

For further information, contact:

Charles J. Klitsch, Esq.
Director of Public and Legal Services
215-238-6326
June 18, 2012

Councilman Curtis Jones, Jr.
Chair, Public Safety Committee
City of Philadelphia
City Hall, Room 404
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Councilman Jones,

Greetings members of City Council and the Committee on Public Safety. It is my honor to introduce myself to you as the Safe School Advocate for the School District of Philadelphia. As a former Assistant District Attorney for the City of Philadelphia, I am honored and privileged to serve as the state appointed advocate for school safety and victim advocacy in Philadelphia.

As the Safe Schools Advocate, my number one priority is to take all necessary steps to make sure that schools are safe havens for learning and instruction. Thus, I have been tasked to advocate on behalf of victims of school violence whether student, teacher or school staff personnel. Additionally, I am further tasked to monitor the safety policy and procedures of the School District of Philadelphia to ensure compliance with the enumerated code of conduct and memorandum of understanding. Most importantly, I have the unique opportunity of utilizing my past professional experience(s) and training to promote overall safety and restorative justice practices in the school community.

My office is housed under the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency ("PCCD"). PCCD is the state’s criminal and juvenile justice planning agency. PCCD has a strong partnership with Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Court Judges, County Juvenile Probation Officers, Police, and Prosecutors. It also provides expertise and assistance on effective prevention and intervention programs targeted for at-risk youth in our schools and communities. The Chairman of the Commission, Mark Zimmer, has assured me of the support of the experts in his agency toward the fulfillment of my statutory duties, one of which is to provide an annual report in August to the Governor and the General Assembly.
It is with the support of PCCD and their expertise that I know I will work tirelessly towards improving school climate. I am in this role to serve the citizens of the City of Philadelphia and Commonwealth as an advocate and that is what I intend to do. In closing, I look forward to the conversations I expect my office will have with City Council and, specifically, with the Committee on Public Safety. Chairman, I trust that the Committee on Public Safety is committed to addressing all possible viable alternatives in promoting safety practices and protocols that serve the entire school community. As the committee conducts hearings and listens to testimony, please note that I also welcome the necessary role and voice of youth in the conversations regarding possible and viable solutions.

Thank you for allowing me to submit my brief remarks to the members of the committee. Again, I look forward promoting the wonderful potential that exists for all children when they are given a safe learning environment.

Respectfully,

Kelley B. Hodge, Esq.
Safe Schools Advocate