

# Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

## 2005 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth

### Background Information

#### **Balanced and Restorative Juvenile Justice**

##### Issue #10:

Research now proves what most of us know intuitively, that the best predictor of adult incarceration is youthful incarceration. Yet the same research suggests a host of fruitful interventions to recapture young lives and set them on a better course. In Oklahoma, the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) is responsible for providing services for young offenders and their families, with a focus toward prevention, protection and accountability.

The good news about juvenile crime is that after its peak in the 1990s, crime rates have fallen steadily. The bad news is that over the past three years, budget cuts have taken an especially hard toll on the Office of Juvenile Affairs, causing the near-elimination of tracking/reintegration program, and reductions in staff to dangerously low levels in the three facilities for juvenile delinquents.

**Tracking/Reintegration:** Studies confirm that juveniles returning home from institutions or other out-of-home placements need continuing follow-up services to prevent them from falling back into old patterns of behavior. These services are crucial to public safety, and require a combination of surveillance (tracking) and therapeutic counseling services. The two programs that provide these services were severely affected by budget cuts, reducing the numbers of youth served from over 3,000 to fewer than 500.

**Institutional Staff:** At the beginning of FY 2004, OJA implemented a reduction-in-force (RIF) to lower costs at the three state-operated facilities. This came at a time when the profile of the juveniles in the institutions was changing to reflect a more violent population. Over 80% of juveniles in the facilities had five or more prior felony adjudications. The result has been numerous assaults on staff, and an increasingly violent environment.

##### Fiscal Note:

The Office of Juvenile Affairs is requesting \$1,285,000 for restoration of the CARS (Community At Risk Services) program and \$3,000,000 for restoration of the Community Compliance and Re-Integration Programs. In addition, the Oklahoma Public Employees Association has recommended adding \$816,493 to the OJA budget to replace staff in the three juvenile institutions. *Total Request: \$5,101,493.*

##### Recommendation:

The Children's Agenda Supports the restoration of funding to the Office of Juvenile Affairs for community-based services, after-care services, treatment staff and facilities.