

THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES APPLAUDS GOVERNOR CUOMO'S CONTINUED REFORM OF NEW YORK'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM WITH THE "CLOSE TO HOME" INITIATIVE.

Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget for 2012 -2103 continues the work that was started last year to make New York's juvenile justice system a model that rehabilitates young people in trouble with the law and makes our communities safer in the process. This year's proposal will also save additional taxpayer money and reduce costs to counties statewide.

Through the "Close to Home" initiative, juvenile justice system-involved young people who live in New York City will be served in New York City. Under the Governor's proposal, the State will transfer custody of youth now placed in state-run non-secure and limited-secure facilities to New York City. Only those young people who pose the greatest risk to both themselves and their communities will be sent to State-operated secure facilities.

A locally-operated system has many advantages:

- **It's Better for Families:** Keeping young people close to home simply makes good sense. Even when the youth is placed out-of-home, it will be easier for parents and other family members to visit, and easier for juvenile justice service providers to interact with families to ensure effective reentry when the youth returns home.
- **It Builds on Existing Resources:** The City's alternative-to-incarceration programs for juveniles are nationally-recognized and admired. The varied programs have a proven track record of providing effective alternatives to detention for young people in the city's juvenile justice system.
- **More Efficient Use of Resources:** Reducing overcapacity at state facilities will allow for more efficient use of City and state resources. Locally-operated programs will be tailored to the meet the needs of youth, and are more cost-effective than state placements. High-end alternative-to-incarceration programs cost around \$20,000 per child per year, significantly less than the \$260,000 it costs per year to incarcerate a child in a state-run facility.
- **Local Control is More Accountable:** Citizens typically have more opportunity and ability to connect with local government and have come to expect local government to be the "first responder" to their needs and concerns. Local control would allow for more flexibility in developing responses to juvenile crime, and the ability to expand ATI and other community-based services that research has shown are more effective in addressing delinquency.
- **It Enhances Public Safety:** Moving youth closer to home will be the latest in a series of juvenile justice reform initiatives that have successfully reduced recidivism rates, resulting in stronger and safer communities. The recidivism rates for youth incarcerated in OCFS facilities are more than 80%. In contrast, between 2006-2008, New York City's alternative-to-detention programming showed re-arrest rates for youth with pending cases dropping from 26% to 17%, even though 22% fewer youth were detained at arraignment.

The Governor's proposal also addresses the need for strong outside accountability. The Executive Budget proposes that the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) be responsible for oversight of the New York City juvenile justice programs. State oversight will be complemented by local oversight, including the New York City Council and the Office of Public Advocate. Finally, accountability is further enhanced by locating young people closer to their own attorneys so they can more easily consult with them about their concerns.

The "Close to Home" initiative will be implemented with care and planning. New York City will first prepare and submit a plan to OCFS. The City has committed to working with advocates, providers of community-based juvenile justice services, as well as national experts in developing a plan that will also be subject to a Public Hearing.

Finally, the Executive Budget proposes to close additional OCFS facilities in a sensible way that can benefit youth outside of New York City through regional placements that would also place young people closer to their home communities. The downsizing of OCFS facilities should produce some savings to counties outside of New York City.

The Center for Community Alternatives applauds Governor Cuomo for introducing the "Close to Home" initiative. It provides the citizens of New York State with an opportunity to ensure that young people involved in the juvenile justice system are given a real chance to become productive and law-abiding citizens while advancing public safety.