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Contact: Jennifer March-Joly | jmarch@cccnewyork.org | (212) 673-1800 ext. 25

**CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN CALLS ON NEW YORK STATE
TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS OF CARE AND
CLOSE UNDER-UTILIZED JUVENILE PRISONS**

***CCC Longitudinal Study of Children in the Juvenile Justice System Also Recommends:
State Funding for the Continued Transformation of the Juvenile Justice System and
Increasing the Use of Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration***

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) today called on New York State to close under-utilized juvenile prisons, and provide the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) with the resources needed to improve the conditions of care, transform the juvenile justice system, and increase the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration.

CCC made these recommendations in a 68-page report entitled: *INSIDE OUT: Youth Experience Inside New York's Juvenile Placement System*, a two-year longitudinal study which tracked the experiences of 12 boys, from their point of entry into a state juvenile justice residential facility, through their release. The vast majority of children in the state's juvenile justice system are from New York City.

"OCFS has begun to take steps to reform its approach to juvenile placement. These actions have jump started and paved the way for significant juvenile justice reform in New York State," said CCC Executive Director Jennifer March Joly. "However, much more must be done to significantly improve youth outcomes as highlighted by the experiences of the youth we followed in this report. Our findings demonstrate an urgent need for New York State to provide OCFS with the program, personnel, and strategic planning resources needed to advance system-wide, the reforms already underway."

"The State must make a commitment to close under-utilized facilities and reinvest the savings in alternative-to-detention programs. In addition, in the rare instances when youth require facility care, OCFS must provide them with high quality services so they can achieve the social, emotional, and educational goals needed to make a successful transition to adulthood and back to their communities," said Ailin Chen, CCC Senior Policy Associate for Education, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services.

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CCC's findings echo many of the problems in the state's juvenile justice system, which were identified by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) in an August 24, 2009 letter to Governor David A. Paterson. DOJ found that the constitutional rights of children in OCFS custody were violated when OCFS employees used excessive force to discipline children. In addition, DOJ found that youth in facility care were not receiving the mental health services they needed. The State is in talks with DOJ to develop a corrective action plan.

Highlights of the findings and recommendations of CCC's two-year longitudinal study include:

Findings

- Youth study participants characterized the facility care experience as a test of their own survival skills and in the end, youth felt that it had little to do with receiving the rehabilitative care needed to address their service needs.
- OCFS staff relied heavily on a behavior compliance approach that too frequently employed the use of physical restraints to manage negative youth behavior. Emphasis was placed on taking immediate control of a situation rather than on addressing root causes of behavior.
- There is an enormous disconnect between the pro-social youth development goals that youth are expected to achieve and the corrections-based behavior management approach used throughout placement.

Recommendations

- Reject a corrections-based facility environment and implement a youth development approach to supervision and care and organizational culture.
- Tailor assessments and service plans to identify and meet individual youth service needs.
- Align OCFS's juvenile justice system placement capacity with population needs and expand opportunities to place youth in community-based settings closer to home.

The full Report, *INSIDE OUT: Youth Experience Inside New York's Juvenile Placement System*, is available on the CCC web site at

<http://www.ccnyc.org/publications/CCCjuvenilejusticereport2009.pdf>

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