



## For Immediate Release

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## Citizens' Committee for Children Calls for Increased Attention to Girls in Detention

### Report: *Quiet Crisis Brewing in Juvenile Crime- A Comprehensive Solution is Needed For Girls*

**(October 30, 2006, New York, NY)** – A new report from Citizens' Committee for Children issued this week finds that while juvenile crime among girls continues to rise, city and state juvenile justice agencies have not developed a comprehensive solution to address the needs of this growing, at-risk population.

In the report, *Girls in the Juvenile Justice System: Understanding Their Service Needs and Experiences*, CCC reports that girls entering New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) detention facilities nearly doubled between 1990 and 2005. Today, one in five juveniles in detention are girls—a total of 1,037 girls admitted to DJJ facilities.

"There is a quiet crisis brewing that requires the urgent attention of city and state juvenile justice officials," said Gail B. Nayowith, Executive Director of the Citizens' Committee for Children. "The number of girls in detention is growing and this poses a special challenge for the city's juvenile justice system. Despite the growth in the number of girls coming into care, there is no plan that focuses on the special needs of young women," continued Nayowith.

CCC interviewed key stakeholders - judges, attorneys, service providers (including alternative-to-incarceration programs and health, mental health and youth development programs serving court involved girls) as well as national experts - and conducted focus groups with court-involved girls. One clear theme emerged from the research: New York City's juvenile justice facilities, practices and policies are not prepared to meet the needs of court-involved girls.

Among the report's key findings:

- Data collected by city and state agencies is not typically disaggregated by gender, is outdated and not coordinated, making it difficult to identify service needs and target scarce resources.
- Negative male peer relationships and on-going family conflicts were identified as key factors leading girls into juvenile delinquency.
- A lack of knowledge and/or training about the needs of court-involved girls results in disparate treatment of girls in court.
- In detention, there is a lack of adequate and appropriate gender responsive staff training as well as health, mental health and educational programs for court-involved girls.
- Many girls leaving the juvenile justice system are ill-equipped to succeed and access basic education, employment, health and mental health services.

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“We know there is trouble brewing. Unfortunately, what we don’t know – what nobody knows - is the extent and scope of the problem—how many young women will be coming into detention. The lack of gender-responsive programs and staff who are trained to deal with young women, raises a red flag,” said Marcy Sandler, Co-Chair of the Girls and the Juvenile Justice System Task Force.

Among the recommendations made in the report, Citizens’ Committee for Children called on the city to conduct a comprehensive city-wide needs assessment of court-involved girls and to use that data to prepare a coordinated city-wide response to meet the service needs of court-involved girls.

“City and state agencies need to get to the bottom of this problem by investing in better data collection so we can achieve a baseline understanding of service needs and start talking about real solutions,” said Katherine N. Mele, Co-Chair of the Girls and the Juvenile Justice System Task Force.

CCC called on the city and state to take immediate steps to create gender-responsive programs and services that minimize out-of-home placements, reduce the negative impacts of confinement, and provide on-going support services for girls returning home from facility care. In response to focus group findings, CCC called for increased capacity at the city and state level to investigate and respond to the complaints raised by girls and to improve oversight at detention facilities.

Finally, CCC called for on-going training for judges, attorneys, agency personnel and service providers that come into contact with court-involved girls to ensure that they have a better understanding of their unique service needs.

“This did not become a crisis overnight. For fifteen years we have watched the number of court-involved girls grow and yet, juvenile justice officials failed to adopt a comprehensive approach to address the problem. These findings should be a wake-up call that we can’t wish this issue away. City and state agencies need to work together to get better data and prioritize the development of a comprehensive solution to address the needs of girls in trouble with the law,” said Nayowith.

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