



GOVERNOR'S JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION

TONY EVERS, GOVERNOR
DIANE RONDINI, CHAIR

To: Representative Thomas Tiffany

From: Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission

Re: Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2025

Date: 8/13/2025

Support Passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2025

The Wisconsin Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission (GJJC) writes to support the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2025 (JJDPRA), introduced by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and Senator Chuck Grassley reauthorizing the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) until 2030.

State Executive Order #43¹ authorizes the GJJC to advise the Governor and the Legislature on matters critical to juvenile justice. The GJJC is a collaborative body made up of professionals and individuals representing a broad swath of the juvenile justice system. Members include a Chief Circuit Court Judge, a psychologist, a Public Defender, a Deputy District Attorney, a social worker, elected officials, victim advocates, youth advocates, and tribal representatives. There are representatives from the Department of Corrections-Division of Juvenile Corrections, and the Department of Children and Families-Bureau of Youth Services. Each Commissioner uses their expertise to identify best practices and advocate for necessary reforms.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP) established the US DOJ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to support local and state efforts to prevent delinquency and improve juvenile justice systems. Through its divisions, OJJDP sponsors research, programs, training initiatives, and awards funds to states to support local delinquency prevention programming.² OJJDP awards Wisconsin Department of Justice (WI DOJ) annual Title II Formula Grant funds based on state compliance with the JJDP.

Wisconsin DOJ monitors for compliance with the core requirements of the JJDP, including deinstitutionalization of status offenders, separation of youth from adults in secure facilities, removal of youth from adult jails and lockups, and reducing racial and ethnic disparities within juvenile justice systems. An effective system of monitoring gives Wisconsin access to grant funds that support state and local efforts to plan, operate, and evaluate projects that prevent at-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system and intervene with offenders early. The grant funds support services that maximize youth's chances of leading productive, successful lives. The Title II Formula Grant provides funds to enhance the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system. This funding is critical for Wisconsin youth and communities and for the GJJC to meet its vision of a state in which all youth and families are safe, healthy, educated, supported equitably, and provided opportunities to achieve their full potential.

Title II funding supports Wisconsin's innovative efforts to reduce the risk of harm to court-involved youth, ensure fair treatment of minority youth, improve delinquent behavioral interventions, and ensure citizen involvement and expertise through the GJJC. Counties, tribes, and agencies apply for grant funds to advance juvenile justice system improvements,

¹ <https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/EO/EO043-GJJC.pdf>

² <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/about>

prevent juvenile delinquency, and support safe communities, youth and families.³ Title II has funded projects across Wisconsin. Local and tribal government and nonprofit agencies in Ashland, Bayfield, Chippewa, Forest, Price, and Sawyer counties have received grants through Title II funding for a variety of programs including mentoring, native lacrosse, cultural youth development workshops, school-based diversion, and alcohol and substance use disorder prevention services. Ashland County Department of Health and Human Services received funding to expand and enhance the SPARK Mentoring program. The funding helped expand program capacity to serve 11-year-olds, provide additional program days and hours, and support staff mentoring in local schools. Due to grant funds, a SPARK mentor was present at Ashland Middle School during school hours three days per week and completed 128 additional mentoring hours. In partnership with the school district, the SPARK mentors provided daytime hours to students who were suspended or under Contract in Lieu of Expulsion. SPARK mentors provided one-on-one or small group mentoring to these youth during the school day. This ensured that youth had a safe, supervised space when not able to be present at school. As a result of these expanded services, the school reported improvements in student behavior during lunch periods when SPARK mentors are present. These services have had a positive impact on participating youth. One 7th grade girl was introduced to a mentor while they were at school. She was reluctant to attend SPARK because she “had some beef” with other participants. After a few weeks, the mentor convinced her to check it out with a friend or two. On her first day, she attended with two friends intending to “settle the beef.” This led to an intense interaction between several youth outside the SPARK facility. SPARK staff deescalated the situation and were able to discuss ways for the three girls to settle disagreements in more effective and productive ways. The three girls expected to be removed from the program and not welcomed back. However, that is not how SPARK operates. Since that first day, the three girls have been some of the most consistent and active participants. The girls have built trusting relationships with SPARK staff, and they regularly rely on SPARK staff to help them work through problems in their life at home, in school, and among friends. Reauthorizing the JJDPA would provide support for continued funding for such effective programs.

JJDPA reauthorization includes amendments that will empower state and local stakeholders to tailor their juvenile justice systems to fit the needs of their communities. The amendments clarify that state advisory groups and stakeholders can direct funds to numerous focus areas. This change empowers local communities and gives stakeholders greater flexibility to respond to youth’s specific needs in their communities. In addition, reauthorization will improve the effectiveness of State Juvenile Justice Advisory Groups by ensuring they reflect the communities they serve by promoting the inclusion of members with relevant youth experience.

Further, reauthorization will bolster and clarify federal protections for youth involved in the justice system by eliminating harmful loopholes and expanding those protections to additional classes of youth. The JJDPA clarifies that core federal protections against the detention of our children in adult facilities apply to those children held in adult prisons and strengthens the prohibition on the incarceration of youth solely for “status offenses,” like skipping school or running away. The JJDPA boosts sustainability and efficacy by ensuring that only states that act in good faith to comply with both core protections and all thirty-three statutory requirements receive funding.

Finally, reauthorization will increase safety for youth in state juvenile corrections facilities by requiring ongoing staff supervision and training in trauma-informed approaches to investigating allegations of sexual and physical abuse and enhance regular screening for domestic human trafficking exposure or risk. In conclusion, the GJJC urges Congress to reauthorize the JJDPA. Reauthorization will prevent juvenile delinquency and improve treatment of youth within the justice system, both protecting our children and our communities.

Diane Rondini

Diane Rondini
GJJC Chair

Aidan Raney

Aidan Raney
GJJC Vice Chair

Attachments – GJJC Membership

³ <https://gjjc.widj.gov/initiatives>.

Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission

Judge Carl Ashley, Milwaukee Co Circuit Court

Ella Bostwick, Certified EMT and Student of Human Services

Dana Brown, Executive Director, Eau Claire Treehouse

Lesley Chapin, Psychologist

Evelyn Coker, Bureau of Youth Services Director, DCF

Ben Gonring, Assistant State Public Defender, Madison

Charles Greer, Child Welfare Supervisor, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

Meaghan Henry, Executive Director, Canopy Center, Inc.

Lance Horozewski, Division of Juvenile Corrections Administrator, DOC

Andrew Miller, Deputy District Attorney, Dane County District Attorney Office

Muskadee Montano, Tribal Child Welfare Project Coordinator, University of Minnesota Duluth

Sharlen Moore, Director, City of Milwaukee Alder

Edjron Pearson, Juvenile Court Administrator, Dane County

Aidan Raney, Youth Member, Consulting Software Engineer

Dorinthia Robinson, Youth Justice Volunteer

Diane Rondini, Former State Public Defender, Juvenile Justice Advocate

Trevor Strickler, Options & Drive to Succeed Coordinator, Operation Fresh Start

Charles Tubbs, Sr., Director, Dane Co Emergency Management

Emily Zernick, Victim Services Program Manager, WI Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force