



GOVERNOR'S JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION

TONY EVERS, GOVERNOR
DIANE RONDINI, CHAIR

To: Senator Ron Johnson

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.

In just the past two years, nineteen local government, law enforcement, school districts, and youth serving nonprofits received grants for delinquency prevention and intervention programs. There are programs funded in every congressional district in the state serving communities from Bayfield to Milwaukee, and Outagamie to La Crosse. A total of \$2,199,415 from awards between 2019-2022 was allocated for local projects and distributed to agencies to implement innovative and effective interventions to improve the outcomes for youth, families, and community safety. More is allocated to be distributed in coming years. As a result of this funding, grant projects provided services to thousands of youth, their parents, and family members across the state. Programming included mentoring programs, delinquency diversion programs, Family Centered Treatment, restorative practices, law enforcement and youth engagement circles, Native La Crosse and other cultural youth development programs, truancy prevention, intensive mental health services, and substance use prevention and treatment. Programs have reported improvements in youth's self-esteem, school engagement including attendance and grades, feelings of belonging at school and community centers, and relationships with family members. Programs have seen reductions in suspensions and expulsions; reductions in substance misuse; and reductions in youth justice referrals. This program, while small, is significant in its impact. These innovative programs serve numerous youth and produce measurable impact.⁴ 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

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GJJC Vice Chair

Attachments – GJJC Membership, Title II Grant Highlights by Congressional District

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

⁴ Brief descriptions of several programs are attached and available online on the GJJC's website: <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

Title II Grant Highlights by Congressional District

District 1

Your Move MKE Inc, received Title II funding to support several of their innovative youth programs. Their Hip Hop Healing Hubs create a space for intergenerational open discussions on social issues and recent events in the community. The monthly hub meetings focus on fostering safe communities by facilitating difficult conversations that break the stigmas and miscommunications between law enforcement and community. The conversations humanize youth within systems, creating a platform for open dialogue and understanding. Each two-hour session brings together youth, law enforcement officers, circuit court judges, legislators, and community leaders to foster community building and solution-based discussions. The Healing Hubs involve participants from various age groups including youth, adults, and elders. The approach supports numerous perspectives, builds empathy, supports community cohesion, facilitates mentorship, and breaks down miscommunications. Through their participation in the Hubs, youth have measurably increased their trust of law enforcement and the justice system and developed alternative and positive ways to express themselves without aggression or harm.

District 2

Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Dane County received Title II funding to support expansions of their Community-Based Mentoring to reduce delinquency. The funds are used to expand access to mentoring to 60 youth ages 8-16 in the Dane County area. To reduce youth's likelihood of justice involvement, the program aims to enhance youth's social-emotional wellbeing and develop aspirations for their future through meaningful mentoring experiences. To achieve this goal, BBBS invested in personnel, volunteer recruitment, process improvements, and quality match support. These investments have increased the numbers and diversity of recruited volunteers, accelerated child and volunteer enrollment, and provided impactful mentoring. Youth participating in the program avoid risky behaviors, show higher educational expectations for the future, and experience social acceptance and increased parental and family trust.

District 3

Agencies in Dunn, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Pierce, and Trempealeau Counties received Title II funding for their programs. Funds were used by Pierce County Department of Human Services to expand the use of Family Centered Treatment for youth and their families involved in the Youth Justice system. The program intended to keep families intact by improving family functioning and eliminate the need for out-of-home placements. The Title II grant funded intensive in-home therapeutic services directed at moderate to high needs youth. The program maintained full fidelity with the evidence-based Family Centered Treatment model and conducted frequent meetings with families. Program staff reported enhanced family functioning, improved communication, increased accountability, and notably, a decrease in crisis incidents with participating families. These efforts benefited the families directly and contributed to a safer more stable community. One participating family achieved success through the program. Prior to participating, multiple family members experienced substance abuse and trauma. Parents resorted to calling law enforcement daily because they did not know how to respond to the kids, hold them accountable and communicate in a healthy way. After their engagement with the FCT process and therapist, the family unit improved their communication, took part in positive family

activities, and decreased their substance use significantly. One of the local police officers began mentoring one of the youth.

District 4

Wauwatosa School District received Title II funding to implement restorative practices at Madison Elementary School and Whitman Middle School. The funds were used to strengthen and expand the district's fledgling restorative practices action plan. The funding provided training, coaching, and supplies for teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff to move from theory to implementation. As a result of the grant, restorative practices are integrated into the schools' culture through both community building proactive strategies and as a response to behavioral incidents. The program resulted in significant decreases in office discipline referrals and decreases in both in school and out of school suspensions. Through the connection built during circles, students' feelings of safety at school increased 57% and tardies decreased 50% from the previous school year. In Whitman Middle School, math proficiency and literacy proficiency increased, and more students reported feeling that their peers support each other's learning. Teachers report seeing kids be more open with each other through the consistent inclusion of community building opportunities in class. Because they are excited to listen to each other share personal experiences, they have become better listeners and community members when it comes time to learn and grow.

District 5

Jefferson County received funding to pilot a deflection program for school refusal. The program was piloted in several school districts in the county, focusing on high school students. The program supports a school refusal intervention specialist who provides Functional Family Case Management. The funding supports training and staff for school check and connect mentors who meet with students at school as well as with their families in the home year-round. The grant provided resources to address students' transportation barriers, provide tutoring, and parent coaching according to youth needs. Additional programming, including Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is offered to middle and high school students at risk of truancy due to trauma.

District 6

Manitowoc County Human Services Department received Title II funding to implement a deflection and diversion program. Through the program they hired a Community Navigator to serve youth referred for diversion. They developed juvenile court policies intended to support best practices and planned for sustainability. The program formed a coalition of stakeholders, including judges, court commissioners, district attorneys, corporation counsel, public defenders, youth justice and child protective services, police officers and the sheriff's office, to gain input and support for the updated court policies. Youth participating in the program have utilized services through the Coordinated Services Team, Comprehensive Community Services, Children's Long Term Support Waiver, Runaway and Youth Services, local mental health providers, family connections, and school support for IEPs.

District 7

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.

District 8

Pointters Community Initiatives in Outagamie County received Title II funds to support their Mental Health Empowerment Program. The program aimed to provide comprehensive mental health support for juveniles and their parents. The project integrated mental health counseling, therapeutic workshops, and psychoeducational resources. The program aimed to enhance mental health resilience, facilitate therapeutic engagement and provide community awareness. The program introduced youth participants to evidence-based tools for stress management including deep breathing, mindfulness, and time management. They held interactive group discussions that fostered peer support, increased self-awareness, and strengthened social emotional learning. The sessions have built trust, empathy, and community between participants. Several therapeutic workshops were hosted at the family shelter that encouraged youth to explore and articulate their emotions in a safe and creative way. The workshops advanced the program’s objective of promoting emotional literacy and healthy emotional regulation. As a result of Title II funding, youth showed noticeable improvements in their ability to manage stress, communicate emotions, and engage in peer support activities. Youth used the skills they learned in the therapeutic workshops in real-life situations at home and school. Caregivers and teachers have provided positive feedback about students’ improved behavior in class. The program’s impact goes beyond immediate support and extends into participants’ daily environments. The outcomes lay a strong foundation for sustained mental well-being, stronger school engagement, and long-term emotional resilience.