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New report touts Louisiana juvenile reform success, Speaker Pro Temp reacts

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A watchdog organization on juvenile crime prevention has highlighted Louisiana for its efforts to reduce the rate at which juvenile offenders repeat criminal behavior.

Speaker Pro Tempore Walt Leger received an early copy of the report, which named Louisiana as one of five states leading the country in successful use of family therapy programs aimed at reducing delinquency.

The report's authors previewed their findings at the Models for Change annual conference in Washington, D.C. earlier this month. The report named five leading states, Louisiana included, which have turned "crisis into opportunity."

Rep. Leger, Chairman of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission (JJIC), praised Louisiana's Reform efforts, stating, "I am proud of the national attention Louisiana is receiving for our success with juvenile reform. This is just one more way that Louisiana has proven how much we care about the wellbeing and future of our youth. I hope more states follow our lead and make the effort to transform the lives of our Nation's youth."

Formed in 2001, the commission is charged with evaluating specific problem areas within the Louisiana juvenile justice system and making recommendations for improvement.

The report, published by the Association for the Advancement of Evidence-Based Practice was posted Dec. 14 at <http://www.advancingebp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/AEBP-assessment.pdf>.

The Crime Report

A Handful of States Lead the Way on Juvenile Crime Prevention

By Ted Gest

States are "surprisingly slow" in adopting proven methods to deal with violent or delinquent youth and their families, a national juvenile justice conference was told today.

Failure to use the programs has been shown to result in higher crime rates and higher costs--- placing youths in facilities or programs that are unproved or may cause youths' behavior to worsen, said Peter Greenwood of the organization Advancing Evidence-Based Practice.

Greenwood spoke at the Models for Change annual conference in Washington, D.C.

Models for Change, started by the MacArthur Foundation in 2004, has invested more than \$110 million in 16 states and 35 localities to support juvenile justice reforms.

Many of the efforts have centered in four states: Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana, and Washington.

Greenwood released a survey of states' use of the three most well regarded programs for family therapy that aim at reducing future delinquency. The model programs are called functional family therapy, multi-systemic therapy, and multidimensional treatment foster care.

They involve sending teams of therapists to meet with youth and family members in their homes over a 4-to-9-month period, costing between \$2,500 and \$10,000 per case.

All three programs, which together have been used at more than 700 sites, have been proved to reduce recidivism substantially.

The five states that have led by far in the use of these methods are Connecticut, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, and New Mexico, which overall make them available five times more than do other states.

Four of the five states started exploring these evidence-based practices in the late 1990s. Louisiana did not adopt them until 2006.

Greenwood and his co-authors, Brandon Welsh and Michael Rocque of Northeastern University, said the five leading states had turned "crisis into opportunity."

Three states were sued by the U.S. Justice Department over substandard conditions in juvenile institutions. In the two other states, "there was a growing political consensus that many youth being sent to placement did not belong there," he said.

In all five places, key stakeholders were assembled to take charge of reforms.

The researchers said a main aim of using evidence-based practices was to reduce "excessive use of institutional placements for juvenile offenders."

They took a look at what has happened in the five states. Connecticut has seen a marked decline in juvenile placements compared to the national average. Maine and Hawaii already were below the national average, and their rate has been stable.

Louisiana, which started the process late, had been above the national placement average but has declined to the national rate.

Only in New Mexico have placements increased in recent years, but the 2010 total is well below that reported in 2001.

"Given the obvious and well documented benefits of evidence-based family therapy programs" in the five states, the study's authors said, other states should adopt similar changes to improve the cost-effectiveness of their crime prevention efforts.