

***United States Juvenile Justice Reform –  
The Pennsylvania Story &  
The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP™).***

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**Jeffrey G. Gregro**

## **United States Juvenile Justice Reform**

### **The Pennsylvania Story & The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEPT™)**

Pennsylvania has long been recognized as a leader in juvenile justice in the United States. Over the past 20 years, beginning with the adoption of Balanced and Restorative Justice as its mission in 1995, the state has recognized the importance of not only supervising and rehabilitating the juvenile offender, but also acknowledging the community, and victims of juvenile crime as equal partners in the system. That year, during a Special Session of the General Assembly, the purpose clause of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act was amended to establish the following mission for Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system:

*“consistent with the protection of the public interest, to provide for children committing delinquent acts programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation which provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community.”*

Based on the model of restorative justice, Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system recognizes three “customers”: the offender, the victim, and the community, giving equal and balanced attention to all three. Restorative justice is based upon the idea of repairing the harm done to victims of juvenile crime and the communities in which they reside. In every disposition in juvenile court, the Court considers how that disposition will hold the juvenile accountable for the offenses committed, maintain community safety, and develop competencies so the juvenile can live a productive, law-abiding life in the future.

There are several agencies entrusted with assisting and ensuring this mission and philosophy continues to be the roadmap for Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) provides leadership and coordination to local juvenile justice agencies. The Commission also provides funding opportunities that support juvenile justice system initiatives throughout the state focusing on evidence based programming and training.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (JJJPC) is a federally mandated State Advisory Group that is responsible for setting priorities within the juvenile justice system. It is upon the recommendation of the JJJPC that PCCD awards funding for local initiatives.

The Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) is the main funding source for local juvenile probation services in the state. JCJC staff provides consulting to all 67 counties in Pennsylvania as well as overseeing the Center for Training and Research located at Shippensburg University. The Center coordinates a graduate education program for those working in the juvenile justice system as well as continuing education for probation officers.

The Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers (PCCJPO) is an organization approaching its 50th year in existence. The Council is a volunteer organization made up of chief juvenile probation officers from across the state. There are over 30 committees working on implementing and advancing the mission of balanced and restorative justice in the state.

Pennsylvania also is fortunate to have a large compliment of community based and residential providers invested in the treatment and rehabilitation of youth. The provider community has stayed current with providing evidenced based services and is dedicated to keeping current with the research around "what works" and adapting their programming to match the identified needs of youth in the system.

### **The MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change* Initiative**

#### **Aftercare Services, Mental Health Services, Disproportionate Minority Contact**

In 2004, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation choose Pennsylvania as the first state in the United States, to participate in the Model's for Change (MfC) Initiative. The three main areas of focus for the Initiative were improving aftercare services and supports for youth returning to their communities following residential placement; developing a system of identification and support for youth involved in the juvenile justice system in need of mental health services; finally to put policies in place to ensure fundamental fairness in decision making and eliminate the over-representation of kids of color involved in Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system. Pennsylvania was chosen as the first state in the United States to participate due to the infrastructure already in place, the commitment of the agencies previously identified, and the willingness of the many partners in the state to address weaknesses identified.

It was through Pennsylvania's participation in MfC that juvenile probation officers were trained in education law to ensure juveniles under supervision were treated fairly and appropriately when reintegrating back into their school following residential placement release. Juvenile probation officers were now able to be informed advocates for youth under Court supervision. Many jurisdictions also adopted the use of

the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2). Developed by Thomas Grisso, Ph.D. and Richard Barnum, M.D., at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the tool is designed to assist juvenile justice professionals in identifying youths 12 to 17 years old who may have special mental health needs. The MAYSI-2 already had widespread use in detention facilities throughout the state but through the assistance of the Foundation juvenile probation departments began using the tool on non-detained youth. The use of standardized decision-making tools also emerged during Models for Change. The State's first Detention Assessment instrument was piloted and eventually adopted ensuring fundamental fairness in all secure detention decisions, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) risk needs instrument was chosen to be piloted statewide, and the *Family Guide to Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System* was also published educating families on the State's juvenile justice system and how families and probation departments could better collaborate.

### **Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES)**

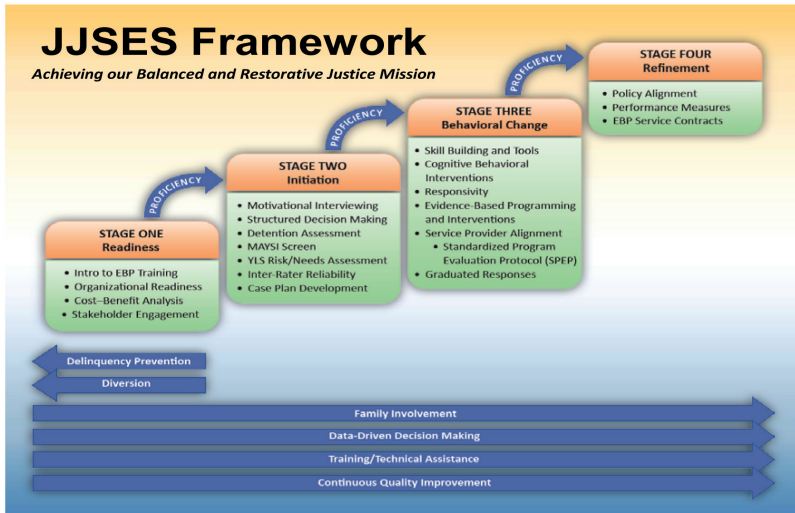
In 2010, building on Pennsylvania's involvement with Model's for Change, state juvenile justice leaders sought a way to sustain and expand upon the progress attained over the previous 5 years. In November of 2010, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission endorsed the below JJSES Statement of Purpose as the foundation for Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System going forward:

#### **JJSES Statement of Purpose**

**We dedicate ourselves to working in partnership to enhance the capacity of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system to achieve its balanced and restorative justice mission by**

- **employing evidence-based practices, with fidelity, at every stage of the juvenile justice process;**
- **collecting and analyzing the data necessary to measure the results of these efforts; and, with this knowledge,**
- **striving to continuously improve the quality of our decisions, services and programs.**

The JJSES and its accompanying Framework intends to utilize evidence based practices to reduce a juvenile's risk to reoffend using the risk-need-responsivity principle. There are four Stages to the Framework: Readiness, Initiation, Behavioral Change, Refinement (see below).



Counties in Pennsylvania are now required, in order to receive their grant funding from the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, to submit a plan that addresses their use of the Youth Level of Service risk/need assessment, the development of a case plan based upon the results of the YLS targeting needs identified, and the development of recommendations to the Court based upon the results of the YLS. Currently 66 of 67 counties in Pennsylvania are at various stages implementing the above requirements.

### **The Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project (JJSIP) & The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP™)**

In 2011 Pennsylvania was chosen from among over 30 applicants throughout the United States to participate in the Juvenile Justice System Improvement Project (JJSIP) through Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Berks County was chosen to be the pilot county in Pennsylvania to participate in the Project. The goal of the Project was to reduce crime and delinquency and improve positive outcomes for youth through implementation of effective juvenile justice administration. The main focus for Berks County was the Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol, or SPEP™. SPEP™ is a validated, data driven rating system for determining how well an existing program's characteristics match what the research says would make them most effective. Based upon the meta-analysis of over 700 research studies by Dr. Mark Lipsey of the Peabody Research Institute of Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, SPEP™ is a program rating tool for comparing juvenile justice programs to what has been found in the research to be most effective in reducing recidivism. A program's effectiveness is determined by its effect on reducing recidivism.

Dr. Lipsey's research found that there are four main program factors that are most strongly related to recidivism reduction and are evaluated through use of the SPEP™:

- Program type and philosophy
- Quality of Service
- Amount of Service
- Youth Risk level

When looking at **program type and philosophy**, therapeutic programs have been determined to be most effective. Therapeutic services include restorative services, counseling services and skill building services. A program's **quality of service** is measured by evaluating their written protocol or process for service delivery, looking at how a program hires and trains staff delivering the service, how a program supervises and evaluates staff delivering a service, and finally how they respond when staff deviate from the way the service should be delivered and how they collect and analyze data on the program. The proper **amount of service** is determined by the type of service being delivered. Each program type has a specific duration (number of weeks) and dosage (number of hours) target. The research has shown to be most effective, each program has a recommended dosage and duration and the juvenile should receive no less than the targeted amounts to have the greatest impact of recidivism reduction. A **Youth's risk level** is the strongest predictor of recidivism. High risk youth should be targeted and prioritized for services.

In Pennsylvania, juvenile probation departments and service providers are equal partners in the process. Programs and services delivered to juvenile justice involved youth are identified for evaluation. Once selected, through an extensive interview with the service provider, the programs type is identified and agreed upon by both probation and service provider. Following program identification, demographic information is collected relating to the amount of service (dosage and duration) for each youth in the program. A quality of service delivery interview is then held gathering information on how they train, supervise and deliver the program. Following those interviews information is gathered on the risk levels of all youth in the program cohort. Once all four components of the SPEP™ have been obtained the SPEP™ scoresheet can be completed (*see score sheet below*). Following completion of the scoresheet a Feedback Report is presented to the service provider and the juvenile justice department, with recommendations for performance improvement. Upon agreement, a Performance Improvement Plan is drawn up and signed by both the service provider and the probation department with goals and activities for *each* to achieve. There is shared ownership of the SPEP™ Score and it is a collaborative process with each entity having performance goals assigned. SPEP™ in Pennsylvania has strengthened the relationship between service providers and juvenile probation departments with the goal being to improve programs based on what the research says will make them

most effective and ensure probation departments are referring the right kids to the right programs and keeping them in the program for the right amount of time.

<b>Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) for Services to Juvenile Offenders®</b> Recalibrated version, 2013		
	Points Possible	Points Received
<b>Primary and Supplemental Service Types</b> [Identified according to definitions derived from the research]		
<b>Primary Service Type for Program Being Rated</b>		
Group 1 services (5 points)      Group 4 services (25 points) Group 2 services (10 points)      Group 5 services (30 points) Group 3 services (15 points)	30	
<b>Supplemental Service Type</b> Qualifying supplemental service used: Yes (5 points) No (0 points)		
<b>Quality of Service Delivery</b> [Determined from a systematic assessment of the relevant features of the provider and provider organization]		
<b>Rated quality of services delivered:</b> Low (5 points) Medium (10 points) High (20 points)		
<b>Amount of Service</b> [Determined from data for the qualifying group of service recipients]		
<b>Duration</b> [Target number of weeks specified for each service type] % of youth who received at least the target weeks of service: 0% (0 points)      60% (6 points) 20% (2 points)      80% (8 points) 40% (4 points)      99% (10 points)		
<b>Contact Hours</b> [Target number of hours specified for each service type] % of youth who received at least the target hours of service: 0% (0 points)      60% (6 points) 20% (2 points)      80% (8 points) 40% (4 points)      99% (10 points)		
<b>Risk Level of Youth Served</b> [Determined from risk ratings on a valid instrument for the qualifying group of service recipients]		
% of youth with medium or high risk scores (greater than low):      % of youth with high risk scores (greater than medium): 0% (0 points)      75% (7 points)      0% (0 points)      25% (8 points) 30% (2 points)      85% (10 points)      15% (3 points)      30% (10 points) 50% (5 points)      95% (12 points)      20% (5 points)      35% (13 points)		
<b>Provider's Total SPEP Score</b>		
		100
		(Insert Score)

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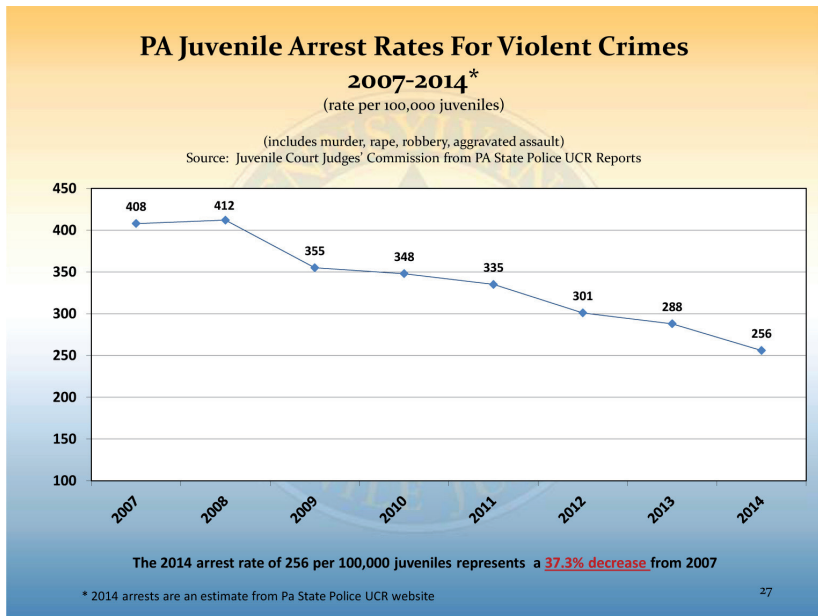
The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol in Pennsylvania operates under the guidance of the Pennsylvania Commission of Crime and Delinquency, The PA Ju-

venile Court Judges’ Commission, and The PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, with active participation from the service provider community. Selected to facilitate SPEPT™ in Pennsylvania is the Evidence Based Prevention and Intervention Support Center (EPISCenter) operating out of Pennsylvania State University. The EPISCenter, with 3 full time Juvenile Justice System Improvement Specialists and 3 part time SPEPT™ consultants, works as a team with juvenile probation officers visiting service providers and completing program evaluations. There are currently jurisdictions in 10 states, in the United States, utilizing the SPEPT™ and in Pennsylvania there are 11 counties piloting SPEPT™.

Over the last 20 years Pennsylvania’s adoption of Balanced and Restorative Justice, it’s participation in the MacArthur Foundation’s Models for Change Initiative and now with the creation of the Framework for the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy have yielded some dramatic results not only for the state as a whole but for individual counties as indicated in the following.

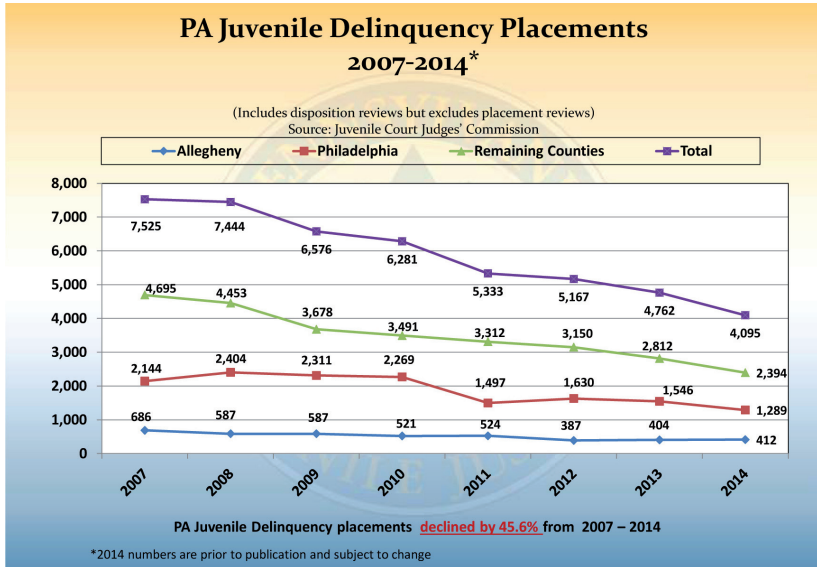
### The Pennsylvania Story

The juvenile arrest rate for violent crime has decreased 37.3% from the 2007 rate.

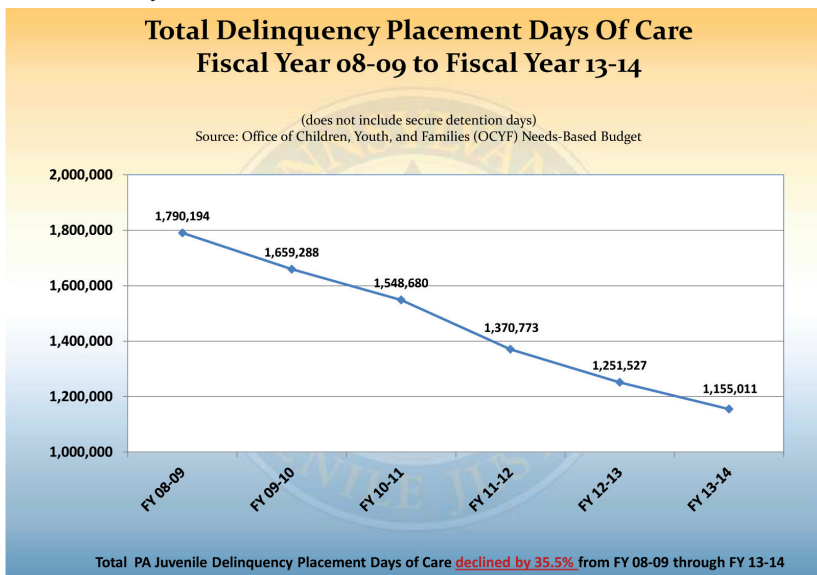




From 2007 to 2014 juvenile delinquency placements have decreased by 45.6%



From FY 2008-2009 through FY 2013-1014, juvenile delinquency placement days of care declined by 35.5%.

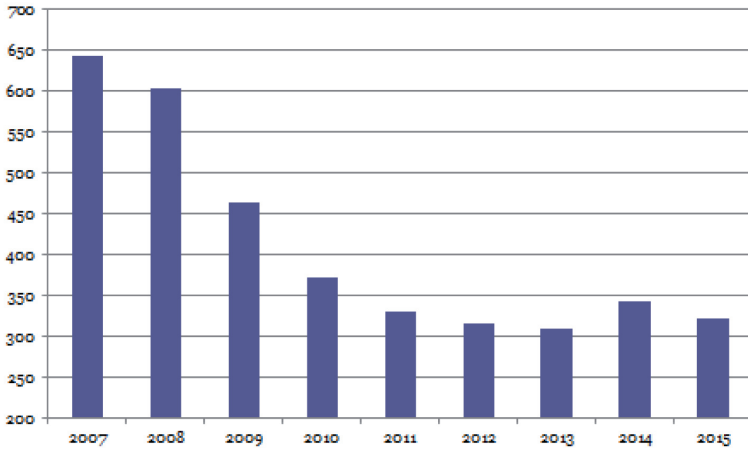


### The Berks County, PA Story

From 2007 to 2015 Berks County, PA Detention admissions have decreased by over 50%



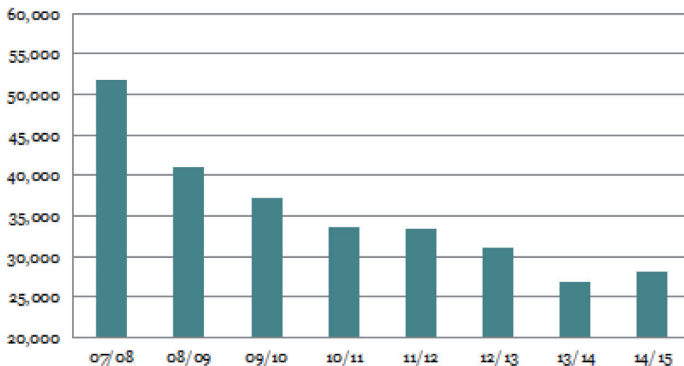
### Berks County Admissions to Detention



Berks County, PA juvenile delinquency placement days of care have decreased by 45.6%

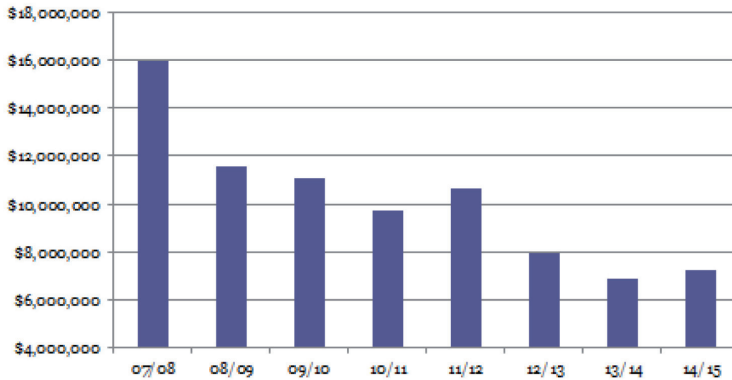


### Berks County Residential Placement Days of Care



Berks County, PA is spending over \$8,000,000 less on placement days of care than was spent in 2007/2008.

## Berks County Total Spent on Placement and Detention



Berks County, PA's Recidivism Rate has decreased from 22% for cases closed in 2008 to 13% for cases closed in 2012.

## Berks County Recidivism

### Cases Closed in:

- 2008- 22%
  - 2009- 19%
  - 2010- 18%
  - 2011- 17.45%
  - 2012- 13%
- Recidivism is defined as a subsequent adjudication of delinquency or conviction in criminal court for a misdemeanor or felony within 2 years of case closure.

The commitment of, and investment by, all partners in the success of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System continues to make Pennsylvania a leader nationwide. Pennsylvania must continue to hold juvenile offenders accountable for their actions while protecting the community and providing justice for victims of juvenile crime. With long term behavior change as a goal we must employ evidence-based practices, continue to collect and analyze data, and continuously strive to improve our decisions and services to the youth we serve.

**Resources:**

**MacArthur Foundation Models for Change:**

[www.modelsforchange.net](http://www.modelsforchange.net)

**Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy:**

PA Juvenile Court Judges' Commission- [www.jcjc.pa.gov](http://www.jcjc.pa.gov)

PA Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers- [www.pachiefprobationofficers.org](http://www.pachiefprobationofficers.org)

**Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol:**

EPISCenter at Pennsylvania State University- [www.episcenter.psu.edu](http://www.episcenter.psu.edu)

Pennsylvania Commission of Crime and Delinquency- [www.pccd.pa.gov](http://www.pccd.pa.gov)

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