

# PRIVATIZATION

## **STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:**

Juvenile services has a long tradition of private, not-for-profit agencies contracting for service delivery. A recent shift toward private, for-profit agencies operating juvenile detention facilities has prompted this policy statement.

Privatization of juvenile facilities may introduce for-profit business motives to traditionally government-operated programs. Operators of such facilities may be influenced by corporate or stock-holder expectations to produce income. This may conflict with professional standards of staff safety, public safety and quality of life for residents.

## **NATURE OF THE ISSUE:**

- The largest proportion of the budget of a juvenile facility is for personnel costs. Therefore, significant fiscal savings are primarily realized by cutting costs in this area. These reductions may result in staff who are less experienced, less qualified and less committed. Non-competitive rates of compensation may also result in higher rates of staff turnover, further diminishing levels of experience, qualification, commitment and professionalism.
- Supplementary services to facility residents, which augment the quality of life in the program and improve residents future prospects, are essential aspects of the quality of life for residents.
- Accountability and monitoring for compliance with accepted professional standards and policies should be required in all facilities.
- Juvenile detention is increasingly viewed as a continuum of care, ranging from secure confinement to community-based alternatives. Juvenile services agencies should assure the fullest utilization of that continuum of care which best serves the youth and the public. That continuum may be interrupted if the largest component is privatized. Furthermore, if higher rates of secure detainment result in greater revenue, there will be a disincentive to utilize more appropriate, less costly and less restrictive non-secure alternatives to detention.
- Government is legally responsible to provide juvenile justice services. Privatization of those services does not relieve government from legal liability when standards of care are violated.

## **POSITION STATEMENT:**

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) advocates the highest level of professionalism in the provision of custody, care and supportive services to youth.

NJDA supports policies which mandate that private and public facilities and services adhere to accepted professional standards of care and custody. Further, NJDA recommends that monitoring for compliance with such standards be rigorously enforced in order to ensure safe and productive conditions of confinement.

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