

A JOINT MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE SECRETARY OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES TO CONVENE A STEERING COMMITTEE TO STUDY AND DEVELOP EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR YOUTH STATEWIDE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON RURAL AND FRONTIER AREAS OF THE STATE.

WHEREAS, acts of juvenile delinquency are detrimental to communities and to public safety and costly to the taxpayer; and

WHEREAS, too many youth are engaging in behaviors that lead to school difficulties, such as academic failure, truancy and suspension, and that lead to arrest and referral to the juvenile justice system; and

WHEREAS, youth involved in delinquent behaviors who do not receive effective intervention services are at high risk for academic failure and increased criminal activity; and

WHEREAS, effective intervention services are not uniformly available throughout the state resulting in inequitable treatment and outcomes for youth and their families; and

WHEREAS, there is also a need for substance abuse and mental health services for youth and a need to deliver the appropriate wraparound services from birth to age twenty-five, including home visitation for first-time mothers, teen pregnancy services and other needed services; and

WHEREAS, the public policy of the state as expressed in the Children's Code is to provide a continuum of services for children and their families, including prevention, diversion, early intervention and treatment; and

WHEREAS, another goal in the Children's Code is to reduce overrepresentation of minority children in the juvenile justice system and in family services and abuse and neglect systems through early intervention, community support services and the elimination of discrimination; and

WHEREAS, a clinical diagnosis for youth in the justice system, although well-intended as a means to get treatment services, often becomes a stigma, labeling the youth and disqualifying the youth for military service and job opportunities; and

WHEREAS, in order to achieve these goals, equitable and guaranteed access to services in rural and frontier communities must be developed, with consideration given to geography and transportation issues; and

WHEREAS, diversion and early intervention, particularly in the schools, will increase public safety while holding children accountable for their actions; and

WHEREAS, there is no national model for providing access to effective services for youth in rural and frontier communities, and New Mexico desires to become such a model; and

WHEREAS, New Mexico needs to organize efforts statewide in order to provide juvenile justice system reform, similar to Bernalillo county's, and to provide equitable access to juvenile justice services throughout the state, secure positive outcomes for youth and increase public safety;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the secretary of children, youth and families be requested to convene a steering committee to study how to develop and provide equitable treatment and equal access to services for youth, from prevention to intervention, with an emphasis on the underserved rural areas of the state; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study include an examination of whether there is equal access to services statewide and whether youth in the justice system are treated equitably statewide; an examination of youth truancy, suspension from school and referrals to the juvenile justice system and how to develop and implement effective early intervention services; an examination of mental health and substance abuse services for youth, especially in rural areas; an examination of case processing time for youth in the justice system from arrest to disposition by the court; an examination of the length of time adjudicated youth held in detention must wait for placement in a treatment program or facility; and an examination of the conditions of confinement

in juvenile detention centers as well as current efforts to improve training for detention officers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the steering committee encourage the nineteen existing juvenile justice continuum boards to help in the development and improvement of needed services, and that the steering committee develop and recommend a long-term sustainable plan for juvenile justice system reform and youth services statewide; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the steering committee include representatives from the children, youth and families department, the state legislature, the administrative office of the courts, the New Mexico supreme court, the New Mexico district judges association, the New Mexico attorney general, the public education department, the department of health, the human services department, the department of public safety, the New Mexico association of counties, the juvenile justice advisory committee, urban and rural juvenile justice continuum sites, the interagency behavioral health purchasing collaborative, the behavioral health statewide entity, the district attorney's association, the public defender department, a local law enforcement agency, a county juvenile detention administrator, a nonprofit organization serving youths and their families, a nonprofit advocacy group interested in youth services and other interested parties as appropriate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the steering committee report its findings and recommendations, including a strategic plan and outcomes, to the legislative finance committee and other appropriate interim legislative committees by October 2012; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be transmitted to the children, youth and families department, the legislative council service, the administrative office of the courts, the New Mexico supreme court, the New Mexico attorney general, the public education department, the department of health, the human services department, the department of public safety, the New Mexico association of counties, the juvenile justice advisory committee, the interagency behavioral health purchasing collaborative, the behavioral health statewide entity, the district attorney's association and the public defender department.