

DETENTION ALTERNATIVES/DMC COMMITTEE

Strategic Issue #1: The Safe, Fair Utilization of Detention

Description. The Committee is committed to reserving the use of detention for those youth who present a danger to the community* and to assuring that negative influences among the detained population are minimized. This commitment extends to an examination and response to these issues with a fair and equal treatment of all youth, regardless of race. To do so, the Committee must closely analyze existing detention trends and practices. The Committee sees a need and an opportunity to identify those children who are held for reasons other than community safety and to examine the juvenile detention of youth certified to circuit court.

Placement for children detained for reasons unrelated to community safety. The fair and safe treatment of youth directs that those who are appropriate for placement such as return to the community with supporting services, placement in shelter care, hospitalization or residential placement should receive those timely placements, rather than be detained. Further, when these children are timely and appropriately placed, they are also protected from adverse influences from “seasoned” offenders. Some of the specific groups identified by the Committee for study include: children with prominent mental health issues and children in need of temporary shelter placement, including those children whose parents are temporarily unavailable. Concerning this last group, the Committee extended the inquiry to motivations for parents to cooperate in appropriately supervising and disciplining their children.

Youth certified to Circuit Court. The Committee elected to examine the issue of youth who have been certified to the Circuit Court and who continue to be held in juvenile detention pending the final outcome of their cases. These youth comprise, on average, 20% of the juvenile detention home population. By definition, all of these youth are 14 years old or older and are charged with violent felonies. The Committee sees the need to examine the possibility of transfer of these youth to the Richmond City Jail and the conditions of confinement for juveniles there, as well as other viable and safe alternatives.

- The Committee defined youth who are a danger to the community as those with a high likelihood of committing any new law offense before their scheduled court date or failing to appear for their court date.

Strategic Issue #2: Identification, Development and Utilization of Safe Alternatives to Detention.

Description: The appropriate placement of youth in detention alternatives protects the community as well as youth charged with delinquent acts, and is therefore endorsed by the Committee. A well-defined, comprehensive range of pre-adjudicatory alternatives to detention is particularly important in addressing options for technical (“VOP”- probation violators) and non-violent offenders, because of the consistently high numbers of detained violent offenders in Richmond. The availability and swift, easy access to such alternatives, for all youth regardless of race, are key to a fair, safe, detention system. The Committee sees an opportunity to (1) identify, and sometimes modify, existing detention alternatives, (2) develop new alternatives where needed and (3) monitor and promote their use.

Identification of existing detention alternatives. There are programs presently used as pre-adjudicatory detention alternatives. Examining the content of these programs, the criteria for participation and how they operate will clarify the range (from least to most restrictive) of existing in-place alternatives. It will also highlight opportunities to modify programs so that they are most responsive to the community needs. There are also other programs which, while not presently widely used as detention alternatives, have that potential. The Committee recognizes the possibility and desirability of using community-based Court Services Unit (CSU) and Graduated Intervention Level System (GILS) programs as well as those sponsored by the community and private service providers as detention alternatives.

Developing new alternatives. Where data and the analysis of existing detention alternatives show that there is need for additional programs or services, the Committee, as community partners, is committed to their development and implementation. The Committee also recognizes the valuable potential in modifying and/or combining existing programs to make them viable alternatives. Specifically, in the routine case of technical violations (VOP), the Committee supports the development of a continuum of responses in the community directed toward improving the youths’ behavior.

Promoting and monitoring the use of detention alternatives. The Committee wants alternative programs to be fully utilized and responsive to changes in community trends and needs. To this end, the Committee supports the ongoing involvement of program users in all phases of detention alternative development and continuing assessment.

Adopted: June 2005