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**TO: Laurie O. Robinson, Office of Justice Programs  
Transition Team for President-elect Barack Obama  
and U.S. Attorney General-designate Eric Holder**

**FROM: Coalition for Juvenile Justice Executive Board**

- Robin Jenkins, National Chair 2007-2008
- Nancy Gannon Hornberger, Executive Director

**DATE: December 8, 2008**

**RE: Recommendations Regarding the Transition of the Office of Juvenile  
Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and its Administrator**

Thank you for the opportunity to share the top three recommendations for OJJDP from the Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ). They are based on input from the nationwide CJJ membership, comprising more than 1800 juvenile justice practitioners, stakeholders and advocates in the states, territories and District of Columbia. For 25 years, CJJ has served as a leadership association, founded and primarily governed by citizen volunteers who serve as members of governor-appointed state advisory groups (SAGs) on juvenile justice under the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). CJJ's members also include state staff, including Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) coordinators and juvenile justice specialists, and national and state-level allies.

Among CJJ's chief concerns are eliminating disproportionate minority contact in juvenile justice and reducing our nation's over-reliance on juvenile detention and incarceration. CJJ strives to build safe communities by promoting the most effective, fair and developmentally-appropriate responses to juvenile delinquency. CJJ conducts its work through broad-based engagement of state-based juvenile justice leaders and practitioners, training and technical assistance programs, government relations and coalition building efforts, development of research-based publications and a range of other forms of information dissemination. Placing a high value on collaboration, CJJ co-chairs both the National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition and the Act-4-Juvenile Justice Initiative ([www.act4jj.org](http://www.act4jj.org)) working to ensure the reauthorization of the JJDP.

**Recommendation 1: Immediately restore a vigorous federal role for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention innovation and oversight within the Office of Justice Programs at OJJDP:**

To perform as a responsive and responsible federal partner with the states, CJJ believes it is critical that juvenile justice continue to have a dedicated focus and a "home" within the Department of Justice at OJJDP, distinct from criminal justice, and aimed at:

- (1) developing national policies, priorities and plans;
- (2) advancing research and evaluation to ensure comprehensive knowledge of delinquency and effective prevention and reduction strategies;
- (3) providing leadership to guide, support and maintain oversight of states and localities and to effectively implement the mandates and purposes of the JJDP; and
- (4) ensuring optimal federal-state partnerships that emphasize strengths at both levels: federal leadership, expertise, funding, and training/technical assistance, and state-level expertise in local systems of care, leveraging blended federal-state and local monies, and a commitment to work progressively with the federal government to balance community safety with developmentally appropriate interventions, supports and sanctions.

**Recommendation 2: Quickly appoint a strong and visionary Administrator of OJJDP with the following qualifications and characteristics:**

- (1) **Firm commitment to prevention and fair, effective interventions.** The ideal Administrator will be deeply committed to preventing juvenile delinquency in the first instance and responding to delinquency and related family and community concerns in ways that are equitable, empirically-supported and developmentally-appropriate.
- (2) **Comprehensive, firsthand knowledge of juvenile justice.** The ideal Administrator will have comprehensive knowledge and experience in both the discipline and the systems of juvenile justice, and be cognizant of the varied forms of state and local systems. S/he will also view juvenile justice as distinct from criminal justice.
- (3) **Dedication as a champion for OJJDP and federal investments.** The ideal Administrator will be an assertive champion for federal/congressional appropriations and other investments to ensure growth within OJJDP, especially in the areas of research, evaluation and training and technical assistance. Dwindling resources and loss of focus have hampered the ability of OJJDP to fulfill its role in recent years, therefore, the Administrator and Office of Justice Programs need to be vigorous and vocal in restoring OJJDP's capacity and credibility.
- (4) **Supportive of the statutory roles of the SAGs under the JJDP.** Under the JJDP, an eligible representative organization of the SAGs receives technical and financial assistance from OJJDP to fulfill advisory, as well as training and technical assistance, functions. Since 2003, these statutory roles have been largely ignored. Meaningful consideration and advancement of policy and practice reforms at the federal level must be informed by the states. Therefore, we ask the next Administrator to value and restore a formal, collegial partnership with our national association of SAGs (as was in place from 1984-2003).

- (5) **Desire and ability to foster cross-disciplinary and interagency collaborations.**  
The ideal Administrator will work well with other federal agencies and generate synergy between departments and agencies that address the multiple needs of children, youth and families, particularly in the areas of poverty prevention, civil/human rights, and integration of child welfare, behavioral health, education and juvenile justice systems.
- (6) **Proven leadership.** The next OJJDP Administrator must strategically build and attract investments to OJJDP. S/he must also project consistency and dependability, ensure that state and local actors have productive working relationships with OJJDP staff aimed at long-term reform, and be quick to hear and confidently speak on behalf of our nation's youth.

**Recommendation 3. Establish and fulfill immediate priorities for OJJDP, as follows:**

- (1) **Provide clear direction to the 111th Congress and the White House to ensure a strong reauthorization of the JJDPA.** In the 110th Congress, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), with original co-sponsors Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI), introduced a significant JJDPA reauthorization bill (S. 3155), which was further improved in the July 2008 Senate Judiciary Mark-up with nearly unanimous, bipartisan support. The next OJJDP Administrator needs to promote the progress of this specific, strong legislation in both the House and the Senate. Enclosed with this memorandum is CJJ's Platform on JJDPA Reauthorization addressing 13 positions related to: 1) federal supports and resources needed to fulfill the spirit and intent of the JJDPA; 2) safeguards for youth, families and communities; and 3) the central value of prevention.
- (2) **Restore confidence in OJJDP and its federal investments in delinquency prevention and juvenile justice reform by enacting a transparent, vigorous effort to engage Congress, the White House, OJJDP grantees, the states and the public.** Since 2000, federal investments under the JJDPA, and other federal juvenile justice appropriations, have decreased by approximately 60%. Moreover, OJJDP has been investigated by Congress for wrongful actions in its grant-making. It is critical that a renewed OJJDP restore confidence in its leadership and its work. Furthermore, OJJDP must be timely and transparent in citing its goals and publicly reporting its progress toward such goals, including all decisions related to grant-making, as well as the promulgation of rules and regulatory guidance.

In closing, we again thank you for your consideration of our recommendations presented here in brief. We also invite you to contact CJJ Executive Director Nancy Gannon Hornberger or CJJ National Chair Robin Jenkins, Ph.D. to enhance this dialogue. Ms. Gannon Hornberger may be reached at: [nancy@juvjustice.org](mailto:nancy@juvjustice.org) and 202-467-0864, ext. 111. Dr. Jenkins may be reached at his office in North Carolina: [rjenkins@cccommunicare.org](mailto:rjenkins@cccommunicare.org) and 910-222-6089.