

**Healthy Families❖Thriving Communities Collaborative Council**

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**Testimony of Richard Flintrop**  
**Representing the Healthy Families❖Thriving Communities Collaborative**  
**Council**  
before the  
**Committee on Human Services, DC Council**  
Concerning the Fiscal Year 2009 Budget for  
**The Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services**  
April 10, 2008

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Good morning, Chairperson Wells and members of the Committee on Human Services. I am Richard Flintrop, policy analyst for the Healthy Families❖Thriving Communities Collaborative Council, and I am appearing before you today on behalf of The Collaborative Council, which provides training, technical assistance and advocacy for the seven HFTC Collaboratives in the District.

In fall of 2005, Director Schiraldi launched an effort to design a new community based continuum of care for committed youth. He asked the Collaborative Council and a number of other youth and family serving organizations to join with DYRS staff and contribute to that process. After over 100 hours of meetings, a framework for a new model was developed; one that reflects strengths based and family centered values and principles, and builds off of efforts by the Collaboratives and many other community providers to support families and youth in the communities in which they live.

It is regrettable that the immediate pressures at that time to address what was a crisis at the Oak Hill Youth Center prevented DYRS from moving ahead with implementation of new community services initiative upon the completion of this work. We are most pleased that over the past four months, the agency has revived the goal of building a more comprehensive service delivery system in the community, and now is on track to fund the establishment of a number of Service Coalitions for committed DYRS youth beginning in FY'09. Last December, the Office of Contracts and Procurement, on behalf of DYRS, released a Request for Information in advance of developing an actual RFA. Two well attended informational meetings were held to allow community stakeholders with an interest in services to

committed youth to ask questions about the agency's plans and to make recommendations as to how it should proceed. Of equal importance, DYRS is providing forums which offer an opportunity for the community to learn more about wraparound services and other components of the new model.

I would like to just briefly raise a number of issues regarding this new design that I hope the committee and the department can address.

First, a simple request consistent with numerous conversations we have had about the need for greater budget transparency. Identify all the FY'09 funds that will be available to support the contracted portion of the new Service Coalitions and re-allocate those funds to one clearly defined line item in the budget. It is our understanding that DYRS anticipates investing perhaps up to \$20 million or more in this new initiative. Those of us interested in tracking the implementation of this program must have a clear understanding of the resources available to support it.

Next, we urge the committee to work with DYRS to determine what commitments from other public agencies will be necessary for this model to succeed. Even the most creative of Service Coalitions can not be expected to achieve positive outcomes without some concrete working agreements from other agencies to assure access to the resources needed to support these youth and their families. For example, DCPS and OSSE should be expected to support a smooth transition of youth back into educational programs. The new mental health services being developed for the CFSA population should be available to those youth who meet the MHRS threshold, and steps should be taken to assure that less intense mental health services are readily accessible from the Managed Care Organizations. DYRS and the Mayor's office, not just the Service Coalitions, should be responsible for negotiating with the various housing agencies to build an inventory of housing resources for older youth. And youth participating in this effort should be given priority access to various employment services available through DOES.

Last, as we have done in the past, we urge the Committee to initiate a comprehensive study into the overall organization of the juvenile justice system in the District. It took far too many years after the LaShawn case brought against the city's child welfare system for the integration of the long bifurcated child abuse and neglect systems. We are facing a comparable disconnect in the juvenile justice system, and one that could have very negative consequences for our youth if they are not addressed head on.

Specifically, we are anxious that an enriched and comprehensive service system operated by DYRS could result in more, not less youth being committed to DYRS custody by the Courts. While we acknowledge the working relationship that exists between DYRS and the Court Social Services, under the current organizational structure, neither this Council or the Mayor can assure either CSS or the Courts will buy into the new model, or might modify standards for committing youth as a means to access the new community based services. The truth is that many of the new supports being designed by DYRS would, in an ideal world, be available to youth much earlier in their journey through the juvenile justice system. Our long-term ability to plan and operate a truly reformed juvenile justice model will succeed only when all the components of that system are under the direct oversight of the District's elected leadership.

Significant gains have been made in the redesign of Oak Hill. With your support, Director Schiraldi's efforts to build a new continuum of care in the community will be a model for the country. This work, grounded in the principles of positive youth development and family support and empowerment, will, we believe, be the best route to safer communities and more successful young men and women.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our observations with you.