

Pennsylvania House Children and Youth Committee Hearing
Delinquency Prevention and Alternatives to Detention
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Testimony of Rhonda L. McKitten

Good morning. My name is Rhonda McKitten and I am a senior trial attorney and the Director of Training for the Juvenile Unit of the Defender Association of Philadelphia. I am also a member of the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Subcommittee of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and serve as the DMC Coordinator for Philadelphia County. I have helped to develop and implement a juvenile drug treatment court and a graduated response program in Philadelphia and have worked closely with law enforcement to design the Philadelphia DMC Youth – Law Enforcement Curriculum.

My colleague Robert Listenbee has described the development of Minority Youth – Law Enforcement Forums in Philadelphia as a tool to reduce disproportionate arrests of minority youth. In 2005, the Philadelphia DMC Working Group created a detailed policy statement setting forth a work plan for its work with youth and law enforcement. One of the chief recommendations of that statement was that a training program be developed for law enforcement officers.

In 2007, the Philadelphia Working Group, with the support of the DMC Subcommittee and the MacArthur Foundation DMC Action Network, began working on a curriculum for law enforcement. The curriculum was created through close collaboration between youth, law enforcement, the Office of the District Attorney, the

Office of the Public Defender, faith based institutions and community organizations a district attorney, public defenders and community organizations and was prepared with the assistance of experienced curriculum developers. We have provided the committee with an outline of the curriculum as well as with several full copies of the curriculum and supporting materials.

The Philadelphia DMC Youth-Law Enforcement Curriculum is a one-day training for police academy cadets, experienced law enforcement officers and youth. The curriculum is divided into four modules. Modules I and II are based on the minority youth – law enforcement forums that have been conducted in Philadelphia since 2003. Cadets observe facilitated discussions between minority youth from the community and experienced law enforcement officers. Youth from local high schools and community programs participate with cadets both as panelists and as audience members. The goal of the panel discussion is to identify issues, concerns and recommendations for improving youth and law enforcement relations from the perspectives of experienced law enforcement officer and youth. After the panel discussion, the cadets and youth in the audience are given an opportunity to discuss the panel discussion in facilitated small groups.

In Module III, police cadets and youth are separated for instruction on adolescent development and youth culture. Cadets learn about youth culture, adolescent brain development, concepts of hypervigilance and hypermasculinity, as well as the distinctive characteristics of coping strategies for boys and girls. Cadets discuss the environmental, physical and biological reasons why teenagers think and behave the way they do and how adolescent responses to authority differ from adult responses. In a separate session,

youth are taught to identify how adolescent development, environmental influences and issues of respect impact their behavior with law enforcement. Youth discuss options that can contribute to safe and positive interactions with police and explore ways to address complaints about police behavior in an effective and safe manner.

In Module IV, youth and cadets join to participate in a series of facilitated role play exercises designed to reinforce the previous training and give cadets the opportunity to practice what they have learned.

The Curriculum is accompanied by a two-day Facilitator Training Program, which teaches adult learning techniques as well as the substantive material in the curriculum. The facilitator training is designed to provide experienced law enforcement officers, juvenile justice stakeholders and other trainers with the knowledge and practice necessary to facilitate one or more of the modules of the curriculum.

The Curriculum was piloted with thirty (30) Southeast Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) law enforcement officers in September of 2008, and has since been adopted by the Philadelphia Police Academy where it is been used to train 260 police recruits. The curriculum will be replicated in Allegheny County in September of 2010. The MacArthur Foundation has provided funding for an evaluation of the outcomes of the curriculum as it continues to be used in Philadelphia and other jurisdictions.