



Department of Justice

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ENTITLED

**GIRLS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: STRATEGIES TO HELP GIRLS
ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL**

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Gohmert and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) efforts to address the issue of girls' delinquency, and respond to the report issued by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) titled "Juvenile Justice: Technical Assistance and Better Defined Evaluation Plans Will Help to Improve Girls' Delinquency Programs."

My name is Jeff Slowikowski and I am the Acting Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), a component of the Office of Justice Programs within the U.S. Department of Justice. As you know, OJJDP provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. OJJDP supports states and communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective and coordinated prevention and intervention programs and to improve the juvenile justice system so it protects public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of juveniles and their families. Historically, OJJDP has had considerable involvement in the issues of girls in the juvenile justice system and we will continue to foster the understanding of factors that contribute to girls' delinquency, and work to develop and promote programs that protect girls. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this important issue.

Among its findings, the GAO reported that the lack of rigorous evaluations of girls' delinquency programs makes it difficult to definitively conclude "what works" in preventing and reducing girls delinquency, and therefore hard to promote specific program models at the state and local level. The report specifically recommends that "the Administrator of OJJDP develop and document a plan that 1) articulates how the agency intends to respond to the program findings of the Girls Study Group, 2) includes time frames and specific funding requirements and

commitments, and 3) is shared with stakeholders.” I assure you, Mr. Chairman, it has always been our intent to respond to the findings of the Girls Study Group (GSG) and we are doing so in some important ways. I would like to take this opportunity to provide background on the GSG, what we have learned, and how we are moving forward.

Mr. Chairman, in general, trends show juvenile violent crime is down in the United States. Juvenile violent crime arrests grew dramatically between the late 1980s and 1994, when they peaked, and then fell sharply for the ten years that followed and have continued to drop, though less dramatically, since then. Nevertheless, there remain causes for concern as recently highlighted by the brutal beating of a young student in Chicago that shocked this nation.

One of the areas in which we remain concerned is the high number of girls who enter the juvenile justice system. Trends indicate the female proportion of juvenile arrests has increased (or failed to decrease) since the 1990s, differing sharply from trends for male juveniles. Between 1987 and 1994, aggravated assault arrest rates for both male and female juveniles rose substantially and then fell through 2008. The female rate, however, rose more (114% vs. 72%) and then fell less (27% vs. 44%) than the male rate. Accordingly, the 2007 male juvenile arrest rate was just 8% above its 1980 level, while the female rate was 83% above its 1980 level. Noting this increase in arrests among female juveniles, OJJDP convened the GSG in 2004, to gain a better understanding of girls’ delinquency and guide policy toward female juvenile offenders.

The GSG has already produced valuable research findings to provide a solid foundation to build effective programming. Because of the bulletins published thus far, we have gained valuable insights into girls’ delinquency. Information has been published examining and describing trends and settings in which girls commit crimes; and whether certain factors (a caring

adult, school connectedness, school success, and religiosity) can protect girls from becoming delinquent.

I want to stress that OJJDP has not finished disseminating the research conducted by the GSG. We will be publishing bulletins that include information on what factors and pathways can lead to delinquency; and reviews on girls' delinquency programs and whether they effectively intervene.

As I mentioned, we have already learned a lot about girls' delinquency through GSG's work. We found that even though arrests are up, girls are not more violent now than in previous years. Instead, it appears that the way we are handling girls has changed - more cases are being handled formally, and the net appears to have widened. However, as the GAO correctly notes, in 2007, states reported in the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice's annual request for information, girls' delinquency as a top issue affecting states' juvenile justice systems. Indeed, despite the GSG finding that the increase in girls' arrests does not reflect an actual increase in violent behavior, they continue to flow into an already overburdened juvenile justice system, and female offenders generally have more serious and wide-ranging service needs than male offenders do. In 2008, states again noted that more funding is needed for gender-specific programs.

We have learned that girls and boys experience many of the same delinquency factors and that, while some are more gender-sensitive, focusing on general risk and protective factors for all youth is effective. The GSG did identify and review dozens of programs that focus on girls' delinquency. However, few of these programs have been evaluated with the rigor required to determine their effectiveness. While none of the programs reviewed were identified as "ineffective," the results, at best, were inconclusive. We need to do better at finding and

implementing evidence-based programs, both overall and specifically for girls. This last point is one I want to stress and one that this Administration has placed high value. A key role of OJJDP is to help juvenile justice constituents identify and implement such practices.

I would like to mention that OJJDP has developed, and continues to enhance a Model Programs Guide (MPG), which is an online tool designed to assist communities and practitioners in identifying programs and strategies that have the most promise in addressing the needs of youth and reducing risk factors and offending behavior. MPG profiles and rates the effectiveness of more than 175 prevention and intervention programs across the juvenile justice spectrum, and helps communities identify those that best suit their needs. Users can search the MPG's database by program category, target population, risk and protective factors, effectiveness rating, and other parameters, including gender.

I assure you Mr. Chairman, all of our steps to meet the recommendations in the GAO report, are on track. Moving forward, we hope to be able to support further evaluation of girls' delinquency programs to improve and expand the pool of available evidence-based strategies for community use.

To this end, we are working to provide more hands on evaluation technical assistance. At the end of October we hosted a workshop in Chapel Hill, North Carolina to better equip girls delinquency programs to conduct rigorous evaluations of their interventions. The workshop will be tailored to address the needs of the participating programs. One of the goals is that participants will leave the workshop with a customized plan with how to evaluate their programs. Workshop participants are limited to programs that provide gender-responsive delinquency prevention or interventions for girls and who have some level of evaluation experience.

Through this workshop, we ultimately hope to be able to strengthen the evidence base in this field.

We are also revising the existing Training and Technical Assistance Curriculum for Girls' Delinquency Programming, which we expect to be completed in December 2009. The curriculum is designed to address girls' unique experiences relating to race, culture, gender, development, economic status, and physical appearance. The curriculum can enhance services in a range of settings, from community-based prevention programs to intensive residential programs and detention.

We are also preparing a solicitation for the evaluation of girls' delinquency programs. Pending the availability of funding, the solicitation will encourage partnerships between girls' delinquency programs and evaluators and provide funding for various evaluations of girls' delinquency funding.

I am confident these steps as I have outlined, will not only fulfill the recommendations as described by the GAO but will produce meaningful research and effective programming to implement girls' delinquency programs. OJJDP is committed to providing support to States and local communities to develop services to ensure young females and their families have access to a range of programs.

In closing, I thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to provide the perspective of the U.S. Department of Justice. We are committed to continuing to work with our federal, state, local, and tribal partners to address girls' delinquency. This concludes my statement Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my statement for the record.