



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Ali Gantz, algantz@pa.gov

U.S. Department of Justice Awards Shapiro Administration \$825,000 to Improve Supports for At-Risk and System-Involved Youth

PCCD will use the funding to evaluate gaps in policies and practices to prevent young people from being unnecessarily involved in the juvenile justice system.

Harrisburg, PA – Today, the **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)** welcomed the **U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)** to announce the federal *Building Local Continuums of Care to Support Youth Success* funding awarded to state and local projects, including \$825,000 to PCCD and \$450,000 to the City of Philadelphia. This initiative helps states and local communities evaluate their current practices to develop evidence-based prevention and intervention services to prevent young people from entering the juvenile justice system and give them the tools to lead safe and healthy lives.

"At its core, the continuum of care framework is a holistic approach that is community-driven, leverages local insights and addresses youth needs through mentoring, after-school programs and other prosocial activities," said **Liz Ryan, OJJDP Administrator**. "Serving youth well strengthens communities and contributes to public safety."

Thanks to more than a decade of reforms and efforts at the state and local levels, Pennsylvania has seen steady and sustained [decreases](#) in the number of young people involved at every level of the juvenile justice system. However, skyrocketing mental and behavioral health needs, gun violence, racial and ethnic disparities, underutilization of pre-arrest diversion, and workforce challenges continue to be serious concerns impacting youth safety and well-being.

"We've taken significant steps to improve the juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania, but we know there is more to be done," said **Mike Pennington, PCCD Executive Director**. "We've always looked for ways to improve and with this federal grant, we'll be able to create a comprehensive statewide plan centered around the voices and experiences of impacted youth and families to offer funding, policy, and program recommendations to guide Pennsylvania's youth-focused services. We are grateful for this funding from OJJDP to better understand the needs of our youth and set them up for lives of opportunity."

PCCD was awarded \$825,000 in federal funds to support an 18-month statewide planning and assessment initiative conducted in partnership with WestEd's Justice & Prevention Research Center. A primary goal of this new initiative is to prevent unnecessary involvement of youth within the juvenile justice system by identifying critical gaps in both state and local systems that create barriers for youth and families. Using this funding, PCCD will take a three phased approach— data gathering, mapping and assessment, and developing PA's Continuum of Care Statewide Plan— with a focus on:

1. Centering the voices and experiences of impacted youth, families, and other key stakeholders within the planning, assessment, and decision-making process.
2. Amplifying racial equity principles within the assessment and planning process to inform policies, practices, services, and programming at the state and local levels.
3. Building a framework for systematically assessing needs, resources, and opportunities at the state and local levels.
4. Defining what a 'continuum of care' for youth should look like in Pennsylvania focused on key system 'intercepts' and identify state-level strategies (policy, funding, programmatic) across juvenile justice and other youth-serving systems.

Additionally, the City of Philadelphia's Office of Public Safety was awarded \$450,000 under this solicitation. The city plans to work with technical assistance providers Drexel University Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab, the National Assessment Center Association, Juvenile Law Center's Youth Advocacy Program, and Philadelphia Family Voices through the assessment and planning process to generate a comprehensive system of support for youth and their families in Philadelphia.

"This is a critical opportunity to re-align Philadelphia's systems and processes to ensure they are family and youth centered as well as guarantee that the array of services offered to our youth matches their needs at all points throughout the juvenile justice system," said **Lisa Varon, Deputy Director for the Philadelphia Office of Criminal Justice**. "The City will work to ensure that diversion and community-based alternatives are available whenever appropriate, and that through a holistic prevention, intervention and restorative lens, public safety is at the forefront of this endeavor."

These efforts align with recommendations recently made by Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee, under PCCD, in its latest [2023 Juvenile Justice Plan for Pennsylvania](#). This plan highlights the key challenges and opportunities facing the Commonwealth and lays out recommendations to address some of these issues in the short-term. The funding announced today will build on those efforts by coordinating a plan for the broader 'ecosystem' of justice, behavioral health, education, workforce, public health, and other youth-serving systems.

To learn more about PCCD's work in creating opportunity for Pennsylvania's youth, visit our [website](#).

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