

**TESTIMONY OF  
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ON BEHALF OF  
BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA  
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**BEFORE  
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE AND RELATED  
AGENCIES**

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**H-218 U.S. CAPITOL**

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the subcommittee for permitting Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to testify in support of Fiscal Year 2012 funding for the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention. Karen Mathis, President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, unfortunately is unavailable to be with you today. On behalf of our organization I am here to respectfully recommend \$100 million for the competitive Youth Mentoring Grants program.

My name is Paul Bliss and I am the Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the National Capitol Area. Today I am here to represent Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and the entire Big Brothers Big Sisters network. Big Brothers Big Sisters is the nation's only evidence-based mentoring program focusing on proven outcomes in a scalable model across all 50 states. Our mission is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with measurable impact. We are a grassroots organization of 371 local BBBS agencies serving 5000 communities throughout the country. We began over a century ago to provide services to at-risk youth in need of additional support and guidance and last year as a national network we served over 240,000 children and youth in one-to-one mentoring relationships.

We know that our nation's children face greater obstacles today than ever before. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's 2006 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims indicates that:

- In 2002, one in twelve murders in the U.S. involved a juvenile offender.
- One of every four violent crime victims known to law enforcement is a juvenile.
- Thirty-two percent of youth ages 12 to 17 report recently using alcohol and marijuana
- The most serious charge in almost half of all juvenile arrests in 2003 was larceny-theft, simple assault, a drug abuse violation, disorderly conduct, or a liquor law violation.

According to two more recent OJJDP studies, police make approximately 2.1 million juvenile arrests each year, with 1.7 million youth referred to the court system and 200,000 youth prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> The average annual cost of incarcerating a youth in a juvenile facility is \$80,000 a year. In many states, the single highest budget expense behind Medicaid is Department of Corrections spending. After decades of ever-increasing numbers of incarcerated individuals, the United States now has the highest rate of incarceration of any county in the world. Nearly 1 in every 100 citizens is currently incarcerated.

Beyond the human cost, in such a strained fiscal environment mass incarceration is not fiscally viable. As a nation we need to take a hard look at how we spend and how we invest. We need

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<sup>1</sup> Puzzanchera, C. (December 2009). Juvenile Arrests, 2008. Washington, DC, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/228479.pdf>

Knoll, C. and Sickmund, M. (June 2010) Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2007. Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available at: <http://ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/230168.pdf>

innovative responses that are evidence-based and that have real and long-term cost-saving benefits. At the adult offender level that may mean “justice reinvestment” and alternatives to incarceration, but if the nation, and Congress, are genuinely concerned about the financial success and stability of our children and grandchildren we also need to reduce the number of individuals entering the criminal justice system - and that means investing in youth development.

There is a difference between investment and spending. The President’s Fiscal Year 2012 Budget not only proposes a 34% cut to Juvenile Justice spending, it reduces or consolidates programs which support youth while increasing those that support investment in corrections spending. While we appreciate the President’s efforts to encourage innovation and make the juvenile corrections systems safer and more effective, Big Brothers Big Sisters urges Congress to recognize the shortsightedness of spending for incarceration, at the expense of investing in prevention.

Programs such as the OJJDP’s Youth Mentoring Grants are upfront and forward-thinking investments that divert at-risk youth away from the criminal justice system. Investing in youth mentoring could be considered insignificant when compared to the alternative downstream costs of arrest, prosecution and incarceration. While it may require \$80,000 a year to incarcerate a juvenile offender, Big Brothers Big Sisters needs just \$1,200 a year to mentor a child in a one-to-one relationship. Furthermore, while States bear the entire cost of incarcerating an individual, funds appropriated for youth mentoring can and should be used to leverage hundreds of millions in private and foundation donations – thereby multiplying the effect of public investment.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters program model is effective at producing positive youth outcomes. There is strong evidence that makes the case for placing a Big Brother or Big Sister in the life of an at-risk youth in order to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. Our program model works as an effective and efficient strategy for supporting at-risk youth. According to 1995 Public/Private Ventures’ (P/PV) landmark impact study<sup>2</sup>, children who are matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister were:

- 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
- 52% less likely to skip school
- 37% less likely to skip a class
- more confident of their performance in schoolwork
- less likely to hit someone
- getting along better with their families

Intuitively we know that children with less drug or alcohol use, less truancy, better academic performance and strong family lives are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. However, Big Brothers Big Sisters is also incessant in our drive to develop hard data resources. Last year the network built its new Nationwide Strategic Direction and reinforced our dedication to expanding and improving the impact our mentoring programs have on the youth that are at the greatest risk of entering, or are already in, the juvenile justice system. This firm commitment to

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<sup>2</sup> Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B., and Resch, N.L. (1995) Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures

averting youth away from juvenile delinquency has manifested itself in the creation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Juvenile Justice Initiative.

With our competitively awarded Fiscal Year 2010 Youth Mentoring grant we committed to reducing the incidence of juvenile crime in 50 underserved communities across the country by our evidence-based mentoring services to more than 13,725 newly identified high-risk and at-risk youth. We also established ten pilot sites to direct our learning around a more intentional involvement with local juvenile justice courts. Outcome data and assessments from these ten locations will be reviewed and broadly applied to other Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliates serving communities with particularly high populations of high-risk delinquent youth, such as mine.

As you may know, OJJDP defines “at-risk youth” as youth exposed to high levels of risk in their families, homes, communities, and social environments to such a degree that it could lead to educational failure, dropping out of school, or involvement in juvenile delinquency. At the start of the Juvenile Justice Initiative, more than 75% of Big Brothers Big Sisters’ Littles were experiencing at least one of the following risk factors: living in poverty, having at least one incarcerated parent/guardian, and/or residing in single-parent households. These statistics demonstrate that Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs are serving at-risk youth as a primary constituency.

OJJDP defines the term “high-risk” youth as youth with present or past involvement with the juvenile justice system. The Department of Justice’s investment in our Juvenile Justice Initiative represents confidence in the first phase of Big Brothers Big Sisters’ movement to increase the number of high-risk youth that our agencies serve across the country. Thanks to this investment, Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliates have already undertaken the initial steps to working with greater efficacy alongside local justice systems in the provision of positive supportive relationships to youth already in the system, reducing recidivism rates of high-risk youth, and ultimately lessening the costly burden high-risk youth have on justice systems, the economy and American society as a whole.

The first phase of the Juvenile Justice Initiative was designed to formalize high-risk referral sources, build resources for the larger mentoring and delinquency prevention field, and to set up the infrastructure to measure the specific diversionary impact Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs have on at-risk and high-risk youth from juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drug use, truancy, and other problem behaviors. Aside from the number of youth the Juvenile Justice Initiative will deter from these behaviors during its first year, the significant FY10 investment represents the *initial step* in establishing Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs as a cost-effective program for reducing juvenile delinquency and the demands juvenile delinquency has on the justice system.

The investment in the first phase of the Juvenile Justice Initiative will enable Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliates across the country to formalize referral-aimed partnerships with local juvenile justice settings. Specific settings where high-risk youth could benefit from Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs have been identified for preferred partnerships including, but not limited to: delinquency and dependency courts, probation, youth courts, and detention and

correction centers. A minimum of 150 of these local partnerships will be in place by the end of the first phase of the Juvenile Justice Initiative.

Second, funding the first phase of the initiative will enable Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to develop resources and trainings to assist local organizations as they set up formal referral partnerships, understand the complex juvenile justice systems, and determine optimal timing for where mentoring programs can have the greatest impact. Many of the research-based practices that will inform these actions will be extracted from the ten pilot sites. In the first phase, these sites will act as the demonstration sites to produce critical learnings for the project as well as the mentoring and juvenile justice fields.

Lastly, OJJDP's investment in the first phase of the Juvenile Justice Initiative will enable Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to build into its mentoring programs the ability to track each youth's involvement in the justice system, recidivism rates, and the costs Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs can save both local justice systems and the country. The impact that these three functions could have on the justice system will be lost if OJJDP is forced to cut its investment in the project going forward. A commonality of each of the aforementioned deliverables is the creation and building of the relationships, resources, and infrastructure that will enable Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliates to later become a key partner and leader in delinquency prevention. The maximum return on investment will be realized in the second two phases of the Juvenile Justice Initiative.

The second phase of the initiative, scheduled for Fiscal Year 2011, is aimed at expanding the reach of the Juvenile Justice Initiative and enhancing its impact with an increased focus on truant youth and youth living with military or deployed parents. The Juvenile Justice Initiative will also be greatly enhanced in the second phase through continued data collection and the research-based best practices extracted from the ten pilot sites.

The final phase of the Juvenile Justice Initiative, scheduled for Fiscal Year 2012, is aimed at the analysis of data, the formal publication of best practices, research, and resources, and the rollout of the project to the entire Big Brothers Big Sisters network. Ultimately, by the end of this three-phased initiative, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America will have the model, data, and means to expand the Juvenile Justice Initiative to all 371 Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies and the 38,000 youth on Big Brothers Big Sisters waiting lists to better substantiate the necessary role of mentoring in juvenile delinquency prevention and share with the larger community the practices, data, and research to maximize impact.

In closing, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America fully understands the legitimate pressure on Congress to reduce the scope, size and cost of government. However, we urge the Committee to view juvenile justice programs in general and youth mentoring grants in particular as small investments with big dividends. We ask you to keep in mind that the children we mentor today are the future parents of our grandchildren. If we are to be serious about the long-term fiscal and social success of our country, we need to ensure the success of our children today. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America sincerely thanks this Committee for its past leadership on behalf of youth-development and respectfully appeals for your continued support.