

Testimony – A plea to put youth back into the Juvenile Justice System

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Hello my name is Joyce Bosco. First, I would like to tell you that I never pictured myself standing in front of you testifying on this issue. Not because I don't think it is important. I just never thought it would touch me personally. But now it has.

My son recently got in some trouble legally. He had several misdemeanor charges. He never had any legal issues until after his sixteenth birthday. This has been his great misfortune. My son is an adopted child and unfortunately struggling terribly through his adolescents. He developed a chronic runaway problem, which resulted in him developing a substance abuse problem and therefore missed his court dates. He was rearrested and sent to the Manson Youth Institute.

The first issue I have with minors being sent to this facility is the total disconnect the Adult Dept. of Corrections has with the family of the child. I would hope that this would not occur in the Juvenile System. The family if they are a support system for the child should be working hand and hand with the system for the betterment of the child. When my son first arrived at the facility I was frantically trying to locate him. I was trying to find where he was and how I could contact him. This would be the response of any normal concerned parent. However my questions of concern were basically met with disdain. I was promptly told that he was in their custody now and I had no control over anything that happens to him. This total disconnect was further illustrated when my husband and I went to visit my son on a regular visiting time only to be told he was no longer there. He had transferred to Bridgeport Correctional because of suicidal gestures; we later found out. At that time no one at the Manson was able to tell me what happen. The only way we could find out what happen was to call Bridgeport Correctional even though the incident had occurred at Manson. After at least seven phone calls were made to inquire about the situation (we were shifted from one person to another without any real information given.) we finally found out what happen at Manson. When my husband and I inquired as to whether or not it was policy to informed parents when their children are moved or when something of this nature occurs, we were told this is only done in extreme circumstances. Since suicidal gestures did not constitute this we asked them to define what extreme circumstances meant. They told us our child would have to be dead or on life support. The child we had loved for the past 15 years according to what we were told was no longer our concern. It appeared that the general attitude was that these were throw away kids that didn't have a whole life filled with people that love them. In addition when your child enters the adult system it appears it is acceptable to treat their parents as if they also had committed a crime as well. Although some of the staff was kind and accommodating this is the general attitude. This type of disconnect will lead to my son failing when he is released and back in our lives.

(See back)

The other thing to consider is that everything is litigated today. There are many situations that youth get into today that would have in the past would have been chalked up to sowing your wild oats and handled with a slap on the wrist. With the advent of the no fault philosophy youth can now be arrested for simply trying to defend themselves. This occurs far too often. How is this justice? It is almost difficult today for an urban youth today to make it through to adulthood without some legal entanglements. This is another reason why these children belong back in the juvenile justice system. So they can get the help they need to not be repeat offenders.

The current youthful offender laws seem to have a lot of flaws. They have the courtroom cleared to protect their privacy and rights but then they put them into an adult court system. The ridiculous nature of these laws were illustrated to me when I could not get my son's court date verified at one court even when I identified myself as his mother..

Because of our concerns about our son we choose not to bail him out. We asked the court to put him in a program to help him cope better with life and make better decisions. This was the hardest decision of our lives but we felt it would be the most effective and quickest way to our son the help he needed.

The community court was very responsive to this and I thank them for their help. As we proceeded through the referral process you can only imagine my shock when I learned that there is only one program for people like my son that the court uses in the state. Currently there is a waiting list of 45 adolescents. This is only about a 50 bed facility. How can this be! When there is such a great need for this type of program.

We need a system that can provide a flexible range of services and justice for our children. Money is always the issue but prisons are very expensive so it is just a matter of where the money is spent. I hope that none of you ever have to make the choice between leaving you child in an adult prison system in the hope that he will get treatment he needs, or letting him out without any supports and left to find what he needs on your own. Believe me if we do not invest in our children today, tomorrow there will never be enough prisons to put them in.