Children’s Law Center Launches Status Offender Task Force

The Status Offender Task Force held its initial meeting on July 11, 2014 in Columbia. The Task Force, whose representation includes professionals from family court, child-serving state agencies, law enforcement, and private providers, was assembled by the Children’s Law Center to address the continued use of detention and secure confinement for status offenders. The Task Force is charged with reviewing the current state of status offenses in South Carolina and developing recommendations on how the handling of these offenses can be improved to provide better outcomes for youth and families and limit the use of secure confinement in these cases.

A status offense is an offense committed by a minor, which would not be considered criminal if committed by an adult, such as truancy, incorrigibility, and running away. Research supports the use of community interventions for these non-violent offenders; however, youth in South Carolina are placed in secure facilities for these offenses, an act which can be detrimental to their well-being and result in their further penetration of the juvenile justice system. In addition to being detrimental to youth, locking up status offenders does not comply with standards set forth by the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, thereby resulting in a loss of federal funding for juvenile justice programming in South Carolina.

The Task Force will continue to work on this issue through 2014 by reviewing current practices, policies, data, and trends in South Carolina, and evaluating the availability and use of services for status offenders. The Task Force will also review successful efforts by other states to address this problem.

The work of the Task Force and the Children’s Law Center on the deinstitutionalization of status offenders is made possible through a Juvenile Accountability Block Grant, awarded by the Department of Public Safety. This grant was awarded for April 2014 through March 2015. For additional information or questions, please contact the grant coordinator Celita Hastie at 803-777-0807 or celitap@law.sc.edu.