



## **Legislative Priorities 2015-2016**

PACE Center for Girls advocates for legislation that strengthens the ability to identify and respond to the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, develops comprehensive systems of care for girls at risk of delinquency, dependency or sexual exploitation, and reduces the vulnerability of exploitation of girls in the delinquency and dependency systems.

### ***Protecting Girls from Commercial Sexual Exploitation***

The sex trafficking of American children is one of the most shocking and hidden crimes against our nation's girls and young women. Forty percent of sex trafficking cases in the U.S. involve children and 95% of these cases involve girls<sup>1</sup> and approximately 100,000 girls in the U.S. every year are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup> These girls remain invisible and unidentified, yet they are known to us. They attend our schools and live in our communities. While many have passed through our child welfare and juvenile justice systems, thirty to forty percent of the identified cases in Florida involve girls that come from stable homes.<sup>3</sup>

Public agencies must learn to recognize key indicators of victimization and act effectively on that information. They need to know how to work with child survivors of sex trafficking. Critical to this effort is an informed understanding of the connection between girls' backgrounds of violence, abuse or other trauma, and vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation, as well as the profound and complex effect of the trauma of being trafficked itself.

Many child survivors of sex trafficking were abused, neglected or otherwise exposed to trauma prior to being trafficked. Many of them were runaways, thrown out of their homes, placed in multiple foster homes or group homes or were detained in the juvenile justice system.<sup>4</sup> Victims

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Connections: A Multi-Systems Approach to the Domestic Sex Trafficking of Girls, Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, March 2014

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2010

<sup>3</sup> FBI Special Agent Gregory Christopher, May 2014

<sup>4</sup> Critical Connections: A Multi-Systems Approach to the Domestic Sex Trafficking of Girls, Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, March 2014

of sex trafficking may be kidnapped, coerced, or otherwise controlled by pimps who target places that girls inhabit – group homes, schools, shopping malls or online.<sup>5</sup>

PACE Center for Girls supports legislation that strengthens the child welfare system's ability to identify and respond to the commercial sexual exploitation of girls, reduces the vulnerability of exploitation of girls in the delinquency and dependency systems and prevents the sexual exploitation of all girls and young women. PACE supports a thoughtful, victim centered system of care for survivors of sexual exploitation, including a continuum of care tailored to the needs of each survivor.

PACE also supports legislation that effectively targets the demand that fuels commercial sexual exploitation as well as legislation that increases prosecution for perpetrators.

### ***Developing a Comprehensive System of Care for Girls Involved in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems***

For twenty-nine years, the girls of PACE have powerfully demonstrated that they can overcome extraordinary hardship and trauma with the support of an effective model that offers classroom education, intensive counseling, and compassionate support and encouragement. Every day PACE provides education, counseling, and emotional support for girls who have entered the justice system or the child welfare system. Forty-one percent of the girls at PACE had involvement with the child welfare system because of histories with abuse, neglect or abandonment. One quarter had prior involvement with the juvenile justice system.

PACE advocates for legislation that expands gender-responsive community based prevention, diversion and early intervention services and legislation that provides for a comprehensive gender approach to the continuum of services within the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system.

Florida is moving away from expensive and ineffective detention and incarceration services and toward more effective community based prevention and intervention services to provide a better continuum of care to meet the needs of girls. That shift in policy has been highly effective, but much, much more needs to be done and can be done.

In 2012-2013, across Florida 50,803 youth were referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice and of those, 15,011 were girls. Of these girls, almost two thirds were referred for misdemeanor offenses and sixty percent were considered low risk to reoffend.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children, 2009

Girls' entry into the justice system is linked to trauma, physical and/or sexual violence, neglect, mental and physical problems, pregnancy, substance abuse and family instability. Girls are more likely than boys to be arrested for non-serious offenses,<sup>6</sup> and girls' delinquency has important long-term individual and societal consequences. Girls arrested as teens are more likely to engage in child maltreatment as adults<sup>7</sup>, present a 10- to 40-fold increase in the rate of adult criminality, demonstrate substantial rates of dysfunctional and often violent relationships, and have high rates of multiple service utilization<sup>8</sup>. There is broad agreement that girls' high needs, yet low-risk pathway into the juvenile justice system and the long-term individual and societal consequences of girls' delinquency requires radically expanding community and public resources for prevention and front-end diversion programs.

Girls involved in the child welfare system also have significant histories of abuse, neglect or abandonment. In 2013 forty-one percent (879) of the girls at PACE had involvement with the child welfare system.

PACE utilizes a gender-responsive, trauma-informed, strength based approach to providing educational and social services for at-risk girls to improve academic performance, reduce high risk behaviors and to help them develop the skills they need to lead productive and engaged lives. The PACE model targets the risk factors correlated with delinquency and risk of sexual exploitation in girls and builds on the protective factors demonstrated to mitigate these risks. PACE prevents sexual exploitation, abuse and neglect and juvenile justice system involvement by helping girls increase self-efficacy and self-advocacy, improve health, mental health and well-being outcomes, decrease family instability and conflict and prevent teen pregnancy, substance use and dropping out of school..

PACE is recognized as being among the most effective programs in the country for keeping girls out of the juvenile justice system.<sup>9</sup> The PACE model and others that effectively help young people overcome the experiences and trauma that put them at risk need additional resources to expand to serve the unmet need in the eligible population.

### ***Expansion of the Use of Civil Citations***

In 2011, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) implemented the civil citation initiative to address behavior at a child's first encounter with the juvenile justice system and provide an alternative to arrest for children. Civil citation gives first-time misdemeanor offenders the opportunity to participate in community based intervention services at the earliest stage of delinquency.

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<sup>6</sup> (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008)

<sup>7</sup> (Feld, 2009; Franke, Huynh-Hohenbaum, & Chung, 2002; Synder & Sickmund, 2006)

<sup>8</sup> (Pajer, 1998)

<sup>9</sup> OJJDP Girls Study Group, 2008; Annie E Casey Foundation, KIDSCOUNT Report, 2008

The shift towards civil citation in Florida is in line with what works in reducing recidivism among youth. Studies have shown that confinement or intensive intervention designed for high-risk offenders actually increases recidivism for low-risk offenders, whether juvenile or adult, and that low-risk youth who spend time in formal detention have an increased likelihood to reoffend as adults. Forty-one percent of those who were sent to residential centers and seventeen percent of those on probation in Florida went on to commit another crime within the year, compared with just six percent of youth who were issued a civil citation<sup>10</sup>.

The civil citation has now expanded to 51 of Florida's 67 counties, and more are likely to follow, as a result of the efforts of the Department of Juvenile Justice working with local law enforcement and state attorneys. But the use of the citation program is very inconsistent. Some communities have used it intensely, while in others use is sporadic. Criteria vary widely. Training is inconsistent. As a result, application of this highly effective program remains uneven across the state.

Civil citation is effective in part because it produces swift and certain accountability for young people's actions, which drawn-out delinquency proceedings do not always produce, involves a restorative justice component, and the corrective action is proportional to the offense. Yet by diverting young people outside of formal adjudication, civil citation avoids the negative, collateral consequences of criminal records for youth, which impair their ability to achieve stability and success in life.

PACE Center for Girls supports legislation that expands the use of civil citation to all youth with non-violent, first-time misdemeanor offenses and further supports legislation that requires a gender responsive approach to civil citation programs and services.

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<sup>10</sup> DJJ, January 2013