

EXECUTIVE ORDER 94-08

ESTABLISHING THE COUNCIL ON FAMILIES, YOUTH AND JUSTICE

I. Introduction

The quality of our state's future depends upon the strength of our families and upon our ability to ensure the safe, healthy, and disciplined development of our children.

Over the past twenty years, increasing numbers of young people have found themselves facing problems many adults can scarcely imagine; hard-core substance abuse, delinquency, school failure, teen pregnancy and deadly violence have become almost common place in our children's schools and in their lives.

In 1977, the Washington legislature passed the Juvenile Justice Act, adopting laws relating to juvenile offenders, family reconciliation, youth at risk, and dependency proceedings for children whose parents may not be meeting their obligations.

That year marked the last major revision of Washington's juvenile laws. Since then, the lives of our state's children and youth have changed dramatically, as evidenced by the following:

- the number of suspected child abuse and neglect cases reported to Child Protective Services has doubled in the past six years;
- the number of children in out-of-home care has increased by 30 percent in the past 10 years;
- the rate of teen pregnancy increased by 19 percent between 1988 and 1991;
- the use of cocaine among young people increased by almost 400 percent between 1985 and 1992;
- 13 percent of our 11 to 18 year olds are presently in need of treatment for alcohol and other drug problems;
- almost 27 percent of our youth fail to complete high school; and
- the number of young people arrested for violent crimes has almost doubled since 1982.

Since 1977, in an effort to address the needs of the growing number of young people in trouble, the legislature has enacted several additional laws relating to children youth, and families. However, there has not been a comprehensive review of the 1977 Juvenile Justice Act and these later laws to determine whether their objectives and assumptions remain valid in light of the vastly different lives and problems of today's children and families, to assess their relationship to one another, or to determine their effectiveness in meeting their objectives.

II. Council on Families, Youth, and Justice

WHEREAS, the citizens of Washington rightfully expect that our juvenile system will protect our children and youth from abuse and neglect, assist troubled families, emphasize parental involvement and accountability, help prevent delinquent behavior, provide swift and certain punishment, and ensure public safety;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Mike Lowry, Governor of the State of Washington, by virtue of the power vested in me, do hereby establish the Council on Families, Youth, and Justice.

The mission of the Council is to perform a comprehensive review of Washington's juvenile laws and to recommend modifications to these laws that will result in an integrated juvenile system that is effective in meeting its objectives, as well as in meeting the needs of the children, youth, and families it serves, and that will result in the prudent use of limited state resources. The Council's mission also includes the development of a state-wide strategy for preventing children and youth from entering the juvenile system.

The Council shall be composed of four work groups, as follows: (1) Juvenile Offenders Work Group; (2) Youth in Crisis Work Group; (3) Dependency Work Group; and, (4) Prevention Strategies Work Group. The Governor shall appoint a chair for each work group. The four work group chairs shall serve as co-chairs of the Council. The work groups shall be composed of at least 10, but not more than 17, members. The membership of each work group shall be appointed by its chair, subject to the approval of the Governor. The membership shall be ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse, and shall include persons with relevant expertise and/or broad-based experience.

III. Responsibilities of the Council

A. The Council shall have the following responsibilities:

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of Washington's juvenile laws, including but not limited to those relating to juvenile offenders, dependency/termination proceedings, family reconciliation, at-risk youth, juvenile records, involuntary treatment, compulsory school attendance, and sexually aggressive youth, to determine whether the laws' objectives and assumptions continue to be valid, to assess their relationship to each other and how they can be better integrated, and to identify impediments in the laws that inhibit their effectiveness in meeting their objectives. As part of its review, the Council shall evaluate the fiscal impact of the current system.

2. Develop a state-wide strategy for preventing children and youth from entering the juvenile system. The strategy shall include approaches for identifying, developing, maximizing and allocating resources for prevention activities and for identifying and disseminating effective prevention practices, programs and services. In addition, the strategy shall specifically acknowledge the reform of the states health care system and the decentralization of the state's family services system, as set forth in E2SHB 2319 (Chapter 7, Laws of 1994, 1st Special Session). The strategy shall define the proper role of the state in relation to these reforms and shall determine how the state can best promote and complement them.

B. The specific responsibilities of the work groups are:

1. The Juvenile Offenders Work Group shall review the juvenile offender statutes for their effectiveness in: a) deterring first-time and minor offenders from further criminal

activity; b) providing appropriate offenders with meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation, together with adequate sanctions for those offenders who fail to rehabilitate, and c) imposing penalties that are reasonably proportionate to particularly serious crimes and to persistent patterns of criminal behavior.

2. The Youth in Crisis Work Group shall review the laws relating to youth in crisis for their effectiveness in: a) keeping runaway, truant, and substance abusing youth off the streets while ensuring their safety at home, or where appropriate, in an alternative placement; and b) connecting these youth and their families with timely and appropriate services.

3. The Dependency Work Group shall review the dependency/termination laws for their timeliness and effectiveness in: a) protecting children in appropriate cases; b) reuniting families; and c) placing children in permanent homes when reunification is not in the child's best interests.

4. The Prevention Strategies Work Group shall review past and present state prevention efforts, along with recent state reforms, to determine the state's proper role in promoting and supporting prevention activities across the state.

C. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Council shall review previous studies and the efforts of other groups and organizations, including the Juvenile Issues Task Force and the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council. In addition, the Council shall coordinate with the Special Legislative Task Force on the Juvenile Justice Act.

D. Prior to adopting its final recommendations, the Council shall present its preliminary recommendations to the Special Legislative Task Force on the Juvenile Justice Act and to the public for comment.

E. The Council shall submit a report containing final recommendations for legislation to the Governor, the Attorney General, and the Legislature by December 1, 1994. The recommendations shall reflect consideration of their fiscal impact.

F. The Council shall complete its responsibilities prior to the end of the 1995 legislative session and shall expire following the last day of that session.

G. The Office of Financial Management, in collaboration with the Attorney General's Office and other state agencies participating in the work of the Council, shall develop a plan for the provision of such resources as may be necessary to carry out the functions of the Council. Members of the Council may receive per them and travel expenses in accordance with OFM policies.

This Executive Order is effective immediately.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the State

of Washington to be affixed at Olympia
this 21st day of June A.D., Nineteen hundred and ninety-four.

Additional

By:

MIKE LOWRY
Governor of Washington

BY THE GOVERNOR:

Secretary of State