

## **UNIT AND FACILITY SIZES**

### **STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE**

The juvenile justice system's foundation is based on concepts such as *parens patriae*, the least restrictive environment, rehabilitation, and treatment. Recent political and fiscal pressures have caused many juvenile systems and jurisdictions to choose to operate facilities with a bed capacity above 150 juveniles and living units with more than twenty-five youth. The credible evidence, to date, indicates that this practice increases the likelihood of negative outcomes in the areas of conditions of confinement and safety, including increased youth violence and victimization. The establishment and maintenance of standards developed by juvenile justice practitioners must supersede the vagaries and the ebb-and-flow of politics and fiscal considerations and should serve the best interests of community protection and public safety through the return of the juvenile to a law-abiding lifestyle.

### **NATURE OF THE ISSUE**

The ACA Standards 3-JTS-2B-03, 3-JTS-2B-05 and 3-JDF-2B-02 were developed by the Standards Committee using conventional wisdom, descriptions of "best practices", and reviews of "best research" regarding size of living units and overall size of facilities as it relates to the safety of incarcerated youth. The research continues to indicate that group size has an effect on outcomes for children and adolescents. Most juvenile justice practitioners indicate that size of living units and overall facility size do make a noticeable difference in the management of youth and successful reentry to productive community living.

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services is unaware of research that contradicts the relationship between group size and outcomes as described above. The OJJDP Study of Conditions of Confinement Report of 1994 does not repudiate this research and does not address directly the issues of living unit or facility sizes.

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services, comprised of the National Association of Juvenile Correctional Agencies, the National Juvenile Detention Association, the Juvenile Justice Trainers Association, and the Council for Educators of At-Risk and Delinquent Youth, advocates for youth, families and communities and promotes best practices and quality in professional standards. The National Partnership for Juvenile Services strongly advocates for the conduct of research on the issues of facility and living unit size and outcomes regarding youth safety.

### **POSITION STATEMENT**

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services recognizes the evolving nature of professional standards and the need to revisit and/or revise them periodically. However, the revision of a professional standard must be based on principles of due diligence, including a competent review of current research and "best practices". A long-standing, accepted standard that continues to guide practice should not be changed without new and compelling information to guide the change. The principles of due diligence must prevail in the standards development and revision process.

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services strongly disagrees with the changes to ACA Standards 3-JTS-2B-03 and 3-JTS-2B-05 made at the ACA Standards Committee meeting in January of 2002.

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services strongly advocates for the conduct of research on the issues of facility and unit sizes and outcomes regarding youth and staff safety.

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services urges the ACA Standards Committee to (a) rescind the aforementioned changes made to standards 3-JTS-2B-03 and 3-JTS-2B-05 and (b) not revise other juvenile standards addressing facility and living unit size until research results indicate the need to do so.

---