

**Girls Incorporated®**

120 Wall Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10005-3902  
Tel: (212) 509-2000  
Fax: (212) 509-8708  
www.girlsinc.org

July 10, 2008

Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510



Inspiring all girls  
to be strong,  
smart, and bold<sup>SM</sup>

Dear Senator Kennedy:

As the Judiciary Committee moves forward with consideration of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) reauthorization, Girls Inc. respectfully asks your assistance in improving the life chances of a growing population within the juvenile justice system: girls. We ask your support for an amendment being offered by Senator Ben Cardin of Maryland, which would help keep status offenders out of prison, and provide them with needed services and interventions.

As a nationwide provider of afterschool and summer programs for at risk girls, Girls Inc. knows first hand the potential of every girl to grow into a confident, happy, and productive adult. Around the country, Girls Inc. affiliates offer sports, economic literacy, leadership, violence prevention, and other programs to expand girls' horizons and help them envision and achieve a bright future.

We are also all too aware of circumstances many girls face that diminish their chances for success. Unstable home environments, sexual or physical abuse, and substance abuse by a parent all can send a girl down the wrong path. Once in juvenile detention, girls' emotional health and physical safety are further jeopardized. Girls are more likely than boys to be sexually victimized in a facility. Excessive force, physical restraints, strip searches, isolation, and physical violence have all been documented in juvenile facilities.

By fully deinstitutionalizing status offenders (truants, runaways, etc.), we can keep a significant proportion of girl offenders out of prison. While girls represented 29% of juvenile arrests in 2005, they represented 58% of runaways. Girls and boys who chronically run away, are truant, or violate curfew can be effectively served by shelters, intensive family counseling, and other community-based interventions, all of which are less expensive than incarceration. For example, under contract with the city, Girls Inc. of Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (a state that does not lock up status offenders at all) serves court-involved girls for a cost of \$9200/year per girl,

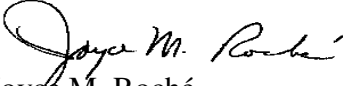
compared to national estimates of between \$32,000-\$65,000 per year for secure detention.

The Cardin amendment would phase out the “Valid Court Order” (VCO) exception to the JJDPa’s DSO requirement, so that status offenders cannot be detained for committing additional status offenses (e.g., if a girl runs away more than once, she still cannot be put in jail). Importantly, the amendment allows state several years to phase-out use of the VCO to allow them time to ensure safe alternatives to incarceration so that children are not returned to unsafe environments. Fifteen states already do not use the VCO.

Girls Inc. is grateful to the Committee and particularly the bipartisan cosponsors of S. 3155 for the advancements that this bill will surely make in the safety and rehabilitation of adjudicated minors. The committee worked diligently to account for the experiences of all parties in this effort. We ask your help in making this additional improvement to the bill to give a better chance to thousands of girls in your state and around the country.

Thank you for your kind consideration. Should you have any questions about our programs or our position on juvenile justice, please contact April Osajima, Girls Inc. public policy director, at 202-463-1881.

Sincerely,

  
Joyce M. Roché  
President & CEO