



UPDATE ON POLICY INITIATIVES

- *ACCESS TO COORDINATED SERVICES*
- *UNREGULATED PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT*
- *EMPLOYMENT LEAVE FOR DEPLOYED ARMED SERVICE MEMBERS*
- *YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE*
- *PROTECTION/SAFETY FOR LGBTQ YOUTH*
- *EARLY INTERVENTIONS WITH JUVENILE STATUS OFFENDERS*
- *DUAL JURISDICTION/CROSSOVER YOUTH*

NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE SERIES



THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE SERIES ON YOUTH AT RISK HAS BEEN A PUBLIC SERVICE PROJECT TO RAISE AWARENESS AMONG ABA MEMBERS AND OTHERS REGARDING PROGRAM AND POLICY ISSUES SURROUNDING AT-RISK YOUTH AND BUILD CAPACITY.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO FOR A TOOLKIT ON PLANNING A LOCAL ROUNDTABLE IN YOUR STATE

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008

THE COMMISSION ON YOUTH AT RISK IS A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY BODY APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2008

UPDATE ON PROJECTS PARTNERSHIPS AND EVENTS

- *GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA*
- *BAR-YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT*
- *LEXIS-NEXIS AND LEGAL MARKETING ASSOCIATION'S "WHAT LAWYERS CAN DO FOR YOUTH" PUBLICATION*
- *ANNUAL MEETING*



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ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON YOUTH AT RISK

A 2006 American Bar Association Presidential Initiative established the *ABA Commission on Youth at Risk*, bringing together the legal community and distinguished experts from other disciplines to better identify and support America's at-risk young people. The challenges facing youth, especially between the ages of 13-19, are serious and life-altering. Among them are severe abuse, chronic neglect, domestic and dating violence, poor and violent neighborhoods, unmet mental and physical health needs, emotional or behavioral problems, substance abuse, gangs, poor peer group choices and relationships, and poor educational options. As a result, these challenges place youth at a significantly heightened risk of involvement with the courts, and it is at this vantage point where lawyers can use their unique skills to help our nation's most at-risk youth.

How can volunteer efforts of the organized bar, law reforms, changes in juvenile and family court jurisdiction and practice, improved educational opportunities, and enhanced legal advocacy better aid youth? We can work with policymakers to help change the law. We can work with courts, and transitioning foster youth, to help young people before their lives slip hopelessly off course. We can better include and listen to the voices of youth who are going through, or have gone through, the judicial process. The ABA can assist in "adding capacity," directly supporting programs and the lawyers that already are making a difference. We can showcase youth programs that, based on independent and rigorous evaluation, we know work, and we can encourage our members to support these activities and replicate them in their own communities.

Since its inception, the Commission has been examining and working to enhance laws, judicial intervention strategies, policies, practices and programs that can help prevent teens from becoming delinquent and engaging in criminal acts. Our focus has been finding better ways to serve juvenile status offenders, such as chronically truant students, persistent runaways, and difficult to parent teenagers; meeting the needs of foster youth aging out of foster care at 18, with little or inadequate preparation for life; addressing the increase of adolescent girls, especially girls of color, in the juvenile justice system; hearing youth voices in court and providing resources to facilitate communication and encourage their presence; and improving how the law addresses system-crossover youth—those youth whose interactions with police shift them from the dependency to the delinquency system.



We hope you will learn more about our work, become involved with our projects and join us as our partner. For more information, please visit our website at www.abanet.org/youthatrisk.



About the American Bar Association

Did you know that we are the largest voluntary professional association in the world? With more than 400,000 members, the ABA provides law school accreditation, continuing legal education, information about the law, programs to assist lawyers and judges in their work, and initiatives to improve the legal system for the public. Our mission is to serve as the national representation of the legal profession, serving the public and the profession by promoting justice, professional excellence and respect for the law.



POLICY RESOLUTIONS

Law and policy reform provides a roadmap for practitioners to model effective practices and for policymakers to implement substantive reforms. Since its inception, the Commission has developed and sponsored ABA approval of a number of successful policy resolutions advocating supports for:

Access to Coordinated Services for At-Risk Youth

Encourages reforms that ensure parents of troubled youth have better access to proven effective, coordinated and affordable services that help prevent youth from entering the juvenile and criminal systems. It also calls upon jurisdictions to offer these needed services to families in ways that do not require them to enter the court system to receive assistance.



Addressing Unregulated Private Residential Treatment for At-Risk Youth

Encourages reforms that would require the licensure or regulation of private residential treatment facilities for at-risk youth, programs that may otherwise operate without government oversight or monitoring, as a means of better protecting troubled youths' basic human rights.

Employment Leave for Caregivers of Deployed Military Service Members

Encourages the passage of laws that would allow caregivers of children of deployed American service members to use employment leave or sick time to provide children with direct care and support.

Services for Youth 'Aging Out' of the Foster Care System

Encourages governments and courts to provide comprehensive services to foster youth until they are at least 21 years old to support their educational, financial and housing needs, and promotes the right of foster youth to meaningfully participate in court hearings related to their cases.

Protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Homeless and Foster Youth

Encourages the foster and homeless youth systems to protect LGBTQ youth from violence and physical harm, and to ensure every child is placed in an accepting, permanent home.

Promoting Early Interventions with Juvenile Status Offenders and their Families

Encourages reforms that provide youth and parents better access to pre-court diversion and early intervention services that have successfully prevented teenagers from entering the juvenile status offense system and falling deeper into the criminal justice system. It discourages secure detention and promotes the use of community-based services for status offenders and their families.

Dual-Jurisdiction / Crossover Youth

Encourages improved child welfare-juvenile justice system linkages while suggesting, when practical, that a single judge hear dual jurisdiction cases under a special crossover case docket utilizing a "problem-solving court" or therapeutic jurisdiction approach and also addresses appropriate inter-court and inter-agency information coordination.

The full text of these Policy Resolutions
can be accessed at www.abanet.org/youthatrisk.



PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

TAKE CHARGE: VIOLENCE PREVENTION, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND THE LAW



THE ABA PARTNERS WITH THE GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA

The American Bar Association has created a partnership with the Girl Scouts of the USA to develop a joint interactive curriculum entitled, "Take Charge: Violence Prevention, Conflict Resolution and the Law," to expose girls to issues around school safety, teen dating violence prevention, legal protections in cases of abuse, and conflict resolution skill development.

This provides a unique opportunity to have a direct impact on teen girls at a critical point in their development, especially at a time when we are seeing a rise in girl violence as well as an increase in the number of girls in the juvenile justice system.

BAR-YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT TO AID YOUTH IN AND EXITING FOSTER CARE

The Commission on Youth at Risk believes that lawyers can and should take a leadership role in making a difference in the lives of vulnerable youth. Youth needs for competent legal representation and counseling have never been more important. In partnership with Casey Family Programs and the Eckerd Family Foundation, the Commission recently launched the Bar-Youth Empowerment Project to Aid Youth In and Exiting Foster Care. The project's mission is to improve outcomes for youth who have "aged out" or are about to age out of foster care by promoting youth participation in court cases and offering access to legal counseling and representation to youth in need of specialized legal assistance.

Unique to this project mission is the recruitment of pro-bono lawyers and law students who will team with youth to provide support on issues such as housing, education, public benefits, domestic relations issues, and immigration. They will provide substantive training to youth on a variety of topics, provide direct representation of youth in selected cases, and work with youth on state law reforms. Although the project is in its early stages, the response from lawyers around the country has been noteworthy.

LEXIS/NEXIS - LEGAL MARKETING ASSOCIATION'S "WHAT LAWYERS CAN DO FOR YOUTH" PUBLICATION and LEXIS/NEXIS CARES "BACKBACKS TO BRIEFCASES" EVENT

The Commission has partnered with its liaisons from Lexis/Nexis and the Legal Marketing Association on both the development of a forthcoming publication and a volunteer activity tentatively planned during the ABA 2008 Annual Meeting in New York City. The publication would be a booklet to guide interested state or local bars, and individual attorneys, in pursuing pro bono opportunities to work with at-risk youth, using their legal skills and in providing help to vulnerable teens. The planned event will assemble lawyers during the ABA meeting to put together items that will be useful to youth in the City who are soon to exit from foster care.



THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE SERIES



We have been helping communities “connect the dots” by facilitating the collective work of lawyers, youth advocates, youth-serving organizations, and youth themselves, in partnerships for reform.

The Commission’s *National Roundtable Series* on Youth At Risk has been a public service initiative to raise awareness among ABA members and others regarding program, law, and policy issues surrounding efforts to address concerns about at-risk young people.

The National Roundtable Series has been an important forum for creating partnerships, commitments and open communication among multi-disciplinary professionals dedicated to youth at risk reforms. The Commission on Youth at Risk encourages advocates for youth to partner with us on important youth related topics. In the past year we have held Roundtables such as the legal and community responses to youth at risk and the unmet legal needs of transitioning youth. Among the additional Roundtables we are hoping to see in the coming year are:

- *In School, a Quality School, and Completing School: How Can We Better Address the Truancy and Drop-out Problem?*
- *Court-Appointed Lawyering for Abused and Neglected Youth: Are We Doing All We Should?*
- *Youth Victims of Youth Violence: Enhancing Laws, Policy and Practice*
- *Ready by 21: How Can We Get All Youth Ready for College, Work and Life?*

More information, including our geographic reach, topics, and a special Report on Military Family-Focused Roundtables, a National Youth at Risk Roundtable Series Toolkit that includes sample correspondence, suggested list of organizations to invite, etc., and how to plan roundtables is available on our website (www.abanet.org/youthatrisk).

HOST CITIES

Atlanta, GA
Kansas City, MO
Honolulu, HI
Philadelphia, PA
Milwaukee, WI
Phoenix, AZ
San Antonio, TX
Washington DC
Memphis, TN
Miami, FL
Boston, MA
Tulsa, OK
Dallas, TX
Mescalero, NM
Salt Lake City, UT
Pasadena, CA
San Francisco, CA
Los Angeles, CA





YOUTH AT RISK FOCUS AREAS

Spring/Summer 2008



In addition to the many lawyers across the country who are supporting and advocating for a wide range of youth related reforms, the Commission on Youth at Risk is now devoting its work to three important focus areas:

BAR-YOUTH EMPOWERMENT TO AID YOUTH IN AND EXITING FOSTER CARE

This project is being staffed at the ABA Center on Children and the Law and is a partnership supported by Casey Family Programs and the Eckerd Family Foundation. The mission is to improve outcomes for youth who have “aged out” or are about to age out of foster care by promoting youth participation in court cases and offering access to legal counseling and representation to youth in need of specialized legal assistance.

TRUANCY AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Teens who do not regularly attend school are on track to become dropouts when they are no longer compelled by law to attend school. They are also at much higher risk of entering the juvenile or criminal justice systems. The Commission is working on ABA policy development and continuing legal education programming to better inform our profession about this. We also hope to promote replication of programs involving lawyers that address these issues. One example of a successful intervention with youth not going to school is in Atlanta, Georgia. Their Bar-sponsored Truancy Intervention Project was created in 1992 and has served over 4,000 students and 81 percent of the students did not return to juvenile court for any reason.



OVERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

The Commission is concerned, as are many others, about African American children being vastly over-represented in foster care. We are looking at the major factors that have been identified as influencing the high proportion of African American children entering and remaining in foster care compared to children of other races and ethnicities, the extent that states and localities have implemented strategies which appear promising in addressing African American over-representation in foster care, and the ways in which key federal and state child welfare policies may have influenced, or could help reduce, African American children’s over-representation in foster care. A policy resolution is being prepared by the Commission for consideration in August 2008 by the ABA House of Delegates. It will address what government, the organized bar, and legal advocates can do to help to address this problem.





A LOOK AHEAD

2008 EVENTS/CONFERENCES

APRIL 15 Commission on Youth at Risk Spring Meeting
Washington, DC

APRIL 16 ABA Day on the Hill, Washington, DC

Members of the Commission will join other ABA members in meetings with their members of Congress to discuss pending bills and proposed legislation that can have a major positive impact on our country's most vulnerable youth.

APRIL 30 - MAY 3

**ABA Family Law Section-American Psychological Association Conference,
"Re-Conceptualizing Child Custody: Past, Present and Future—Lawyers and Psychologists
Working Together"**

The Commission is helping assure that the topic of how teenage youth are adversely affected by living, or having lived in, high conflict and violent homes, or having experienced a high conflict family breakup, is addressed at one of the conference's workshops.

MAY 7-9 ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference

There will be an exhibit table at the country's largest pro bono/public interest law conference, in Minneapolis, to familiarize attendees with the YAR new "Bar-Youth Empowerment Project". At this table we will share information about the project and promote attorney, legal services, pro bono program, and law school interest in project participation.

MAY 28 Think Tank on Child Protection Mediation

The YAR will be represented at a national day-long session convened by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, at their annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, to develop a document on improving the use of mediation in child protection cases. Specifically, we will bring to this the YAR focus of participation of youth in the mediation process and extension of the mediation process to involve foster youth transition-related issues.

JUNE 19-20 ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty's National Conference on Homeless Youth and the Law, Seattle, Washington

This conference, to be co-sponsored by the YAR Commission, will be the first national conference exclusively devoted to legal issues affecting homeless youth.

AUGUST 7-12 ABA Annual Meeting, New York City

The Commission is devoting a full day at the American Bar Association's Annual Meeting in August to *Keeping Youth in School-Law, Policy and Best Practices*, and we are currently working on a policy resolution on truancy, the school dropout problem, and other education policy issues. There will be a Youth at Risk Roundtable on the impact of quality lawyering by New York Law Guardians on older foster youth as they approach the age of transitioning out of the system to adult independence.



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