

Testimony to Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force

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At the Education Law Center, I focus specifically on educational issues impacting youth who are system-involved, residing in or transitioning from residential placements.

This Task Force is charged with making policy recommendations to improve outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. This cannot possibly happen if we leave education out of the discussion.

I urge you to adopt Proposed recommendation #7 which emphasizes the need to ensure quality oversight of educational services in these facilities.

Education can be a strong stabilizing and empowering force for youth. Yet, ELC has worked with hundreds of youth in juvenile justice facilities who have been denied this critical entitlement with devastating impacts. One such student was in the Delaware County Juvenile Detention Center in Lima when the facility was emptied in March after reports of horrific abuse and civil rights violations surfaced. She reported that in the months that she was in the facility, she did not receive **any education at all**. In fact, due to her disability, she was indefinitely confined to unit restriction and prevented all access to the classroom.

Another student who was also in the facility for over a month during that time never earned a single credit.

This isn't just a problem involving one facility, one leader, or one county.

While at Vision Quest, ELC's client, a twelve-year old with a disability, begged to go to the local public school after being improperly forced to remain in the facility's one-room "school" for months. Without any teachers or special education supports, he struggled to teach himself through a cyber program. Each day, he spent five hours at a desk facing a wall.

Youth at North Central Secured Treatment Unit in Danville also report being punished for days by being confined to small desks that face the wall in a hallway, with only worksheets that are far below grade-level, as education.

This is an outrageous failure that impacts youth in juvenile justice facilities throughout our state. We must ensure accountability for the education that is being provided in these facilities.

I urge this Task Force to adopt the education-focused recommendations further detailed in our written testimony. Education is the critical plank on the bridge to ensure the Task Force achieves its historic goal. Thank you.