

**New York City Council
Committee on Juvenile Justice**

Oversight Hearing

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Testimony Presented By

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Good afternoon. My name is Steven Perez and I am the Deputy Director of Strategic Planning and Analysis at the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), which is a member of the ATI/Reentry Coalition. On behalf of the Coalition, I want to thank the Juvenile Justice Committee for convening this important hearing and for giving me the opportunity to testify today. We also wish to extend our sincere gratitude to Council Member Gonzalez, Chair of the Juvenile Justice Committee, for her visionary leadership on juvenile justice issues and her tireless support of the work we do.

As part of Mayor Bloomberg's 2007 plan to reduce the number of youth sent to juvenile detention and on to placement in state custody, the Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator (CJC) partnered with several area non-profits to begin offering alternative-to-detention (ATD) services city-wide. CASES was fortunate to be selected as the provider of these services in Manhattan and launched its Choices ATD program. CASES applauds CJC for its efforts to provide better alternatives for adjudicated and delinquent youth. I appear before the Council today to highlight the success of our Choices ATD program and to urge the Council to support the diversion of youth to programs that are delivering effective services and improving community safety.

Through the Choices ATD program, we provide supervision and support for youth facing juvenile detention while their cases are pending in Family Court. The program is aimed at preventing the disruption that arises when young people are taken out of their schools and placed in detention, away from their families and support networks. In CASES' experience, youth can be served in their communities safely and effectively. Our ATD program operates with a rehabilitative philosophy, focusing on the strengths of young people and helping them foster and maintain their community ties.

Choices ATD provides a number of valuable services to the young participants. After-school activities include tutoring, academic enrichment classes, facilitated group discussions, and recreational activities. Choices ATD staff conduct home and school visits to ensure youth stay connected to community resources and receive the additional supports they need. Importantly, Choices ATD staff inform the court of participants' progress and make adjustments to supervision levels if necessary.

The Choices ATD program has reduced the involvement of participants in the criminal justice system. Nearly 300 moderate risk youth have been diverted to the program. 75% of assigned youth were retained in the community for the length of the program. Approximately 36% fewer arrests were made of assigned participants and 21% fewer participants failed to appear in court than were predicted by baseline RAI scores.¹ In FY09, only 11% of participants were ultimately placed in state custody at case disposition. This low number is particularly significant in light of recent reports that show

¹ Overall rates of decrease were calculated using weighted probability of rearrest and FTA for high, low, and moderate risk categories, since at least one of each category appears among Choices ATD participants that have exited the program.

that “New York’s juvenile justice system is failing in its mission to nurture and care for young people in state custody.”²

In addition to delivering successful outcomes, Choices ATD is cost-effective. While juvenile detention costs \$715 per youth per day, Choices ATD costs only \$46 per youth per day. In these difficult economic times, it makes sense to allocate resources away from costly juvenile detention facilities and increase investment in effective ATD programs.

Building on its success, the Choices ATD program is expanding thanks to a Community Reinvestment Program contract awarded to CASES from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). OCFS is taking bold steps to fix the broken juvenile justice system, and CASES is proud to be part of this effort. The expanded Choices ATD program will allow us to nearly double the number of youth we currently serve and will include probation violators, which were identified by CJC and the Chief Prosecutor of the Family Court Division as an additional population that could benefit from CASES’ program. Partnering with other organizations, Choices ATD will offer participants numerous services, including evidence-based mental health interventions; teen pregnancy interventions; after-school programming such as fitness classes, tutoring, and a daily meal service; connections to continuing services for youth and families following program completion; and legal education and other wraparound services, including family benefits counseling and assistance resolving school suspension proceedings.

In conclusion, we urge the Council to promote the use of alternatives-to-detention for those youth that are best served in their communities. It is the best policy option to promote the long-term success of court-involved youth and ensure community safety. Thank you for your continued support of ATD programs and thank you again for this opportunity to testify today.

² Charting a New Course: A Blueprint for Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State, December 2009, <http://www.vera.org/download?file=2944/Charting-a-new-course-A-blueprint-for-transforming-juvenile-justice-in-New-York-State.pdf>. See also Letter to Governor Paterson Re: Investigation of the Lansing Residential Center, Louis Gossett, Jr. Residential Center, Tyron Residential Center, and Tyron Girls Center, August 14, 2009, http://www.justice.gov/crt/split/documents/NY_juvenile_facilities_findlet_08-14-2009.pdf.