

**TESTIMONY OF  
BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF AMERICA  
230 NORTH THIRTEENTH STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107  
BEFORE  
THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMERCE JUSTICE SCIENCE SUBCOMMITTEE  
MARCH 15, 2013**

Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Fattah, thank you for convening this hearing to discuss effective programs and strategies funded by the House Appropriations Commerce Justice Science Subcommittee. On behalf of the 408,412 Bigs and Littles our network of 355 local affiliates screen, match, and support, I am here to respectfully advocate for \$90 Million to support the Youth Mentoring Grants program at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. OJJDP Youth Mentoring Grants are competitively awarded to nonprofit organizations that reduce youth interaction with the juvenile justice system. Grantees must target an at-risk or high-risk population younger than 18 years of age with a goal reduce juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, truancy, and other problem and high-risk behaviors by providing direct one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring, or peer-mentoring services to underserved and at-risk youth populations and youth with a parent in the military, including a deployed parent.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is the nation's only evidence-based mentoring program focusing on proven outcomes in a scalable model across all 50 states. Our mission is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships with measurable impact. We are a grassroots organization of 355 local BBBS agencies serving thousands of communities throughout the country. We began over a century ago to provide services to at-risk youth in need of additional support and guidance and last year as a national network we served over 204,206 children and youth in one-to-one mentoring relationships.

We know that our nation's children face greater obstacles today than ever before. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report 2012 indicates that:

- In 2009, juvenile courts in the United States handled approximately 1.5 million delinquency cases that involved juveniles charged with criminal law violations
- The female proportion of the delinquency case load has risen to 28% in 2009, a sharp rise since 1985 reports of 19%.

According to the recent Defending Childhood Report by the Department of Justice, of the 76 million children in the US, an estimated 46 million are exposed to violence, crime and abuse on an annual basis. Children exposed to violence and trauma are at an increased risk of disruptive behavior, cognitive and non-cognitive impairments, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and substance abuse. With police making approximately 2.1 million juvenile arrests each year, with 1.7 million youth referred to the court system and 200,000 youth prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system, our nation needs an evidence-based solution that works to prevent at-risk youth from entering the justice system.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Puzzanchera, C. (December 2009). Juvenile Arrests, 2008. Washington, DC, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and

“The longterm negative outcomes of exposure to violence can be prevented, and children exposed to violence can be helped to recover. Children exposed to violence can heal if we identify them early and give them specialized services, evidence-based treatment, and proper care and support. We have the power to end the damage to children from violence and abuse in our country; it does not need to be inevitable.” - Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s groundbreaking National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV).

As a nation we need to take a hard look at how we spend and how we invest. We need innovative responses that are evidence-based and that have real and long-term cost-saving benefits. There is a difference between investment and spending. To reduce the number of young people entering the criminal justice system, we must invest in youth development. Currently, both the House and Senate Fiscal Year 2014 Commerce Justice Science bills include \$90 million for the Youth Mentoring Grants program. Big Brothers Big Sisters encourages Congress to fund the Youth Mentoring Grants program at \$90 million to continue this important work.

OJJDP’s Youth Mentoring Grants are upfront and forward-thinking investments that divert at-risk and high-risk youth away from the criminal justice system. Investing in youth mentoring could be considered insignificant when compared to the alternative downstream costs of arrest, prosecution and incarceration. While it may require \$88,000 a year to incarcerate a juvenile offender, Big Brothers Big Sisters needs just \$1,500 a year to mentor a child in a one-to-one relationship. Furthermore, while States bear the entire cost of incarcerating an individual, funds appropriated for youth mentoring can and should be used to leverage hundreds of millions in private and foundation donations – thereby multiplying the effect of public investment.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters program model incorporates all leading best-practices and is effective at producing positive youth outcomes. There is strong evidence that makes the case for placing a Big Brother or Big Sister in the life of an at-risk youth in order to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. Our program model works as an effective and efficient strategy for supporting at-risk youth. According to 1995 Public/Private Ventures’ (P/PV) landmark impact study<sup>2</sup>, children who are matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister were:

- 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
- 52% less likely to skip school
- 37% less likely to skip a class
- more confident of their performance in schoolwork
- less likely to hit someone
- getting along better with their families

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Delinquency Prevention, available at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/228479.pdf>

Knoll, C. and Sickmund, M. (June 2010) Delinquency Cases in Juvenile Court, 2007. Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available at: <http://ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/230168.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Tierney, J.P., Grossman, J.B., and Resch, N.L. (1995) Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures

Intuitively we know that children with less drug or alcohol use, less truancy, better academic performance and strong family lives are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. However, Big Brothers Big Sisters is also relentless in our drive to develop hard data resources. Our current *Nationwide Strategic Direction* reinforces our dedication to expanding and improving the impact our mentoring programs have on the youth that are at the greatest risk of entering, or are already in, the juvenile justice system. This firm commitment to averting youth away from juvenile delinquency has manifested itself in the creation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Juvenile Justice Initiative.

With a competitively awarded Youth Mentoring Grant between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2012 we committed to reducing the incidence of juvenile crime in underserved communities across the country by expanding our evidence-based mentoring services to more than 30,500 newly identified high-risk and at-risk youth. We also established ten pilot sites to direct our learning around how to effectively establish relationships with juvenile justice systems and organizations that will yield referrals of youth who are currently or previously involved with the juvenile justice system. The pilots have enabled us to learn about which segments of youth Big Brothers Big Sisters can best impact, what resources agencies need to effectively serve this population, and how to efficiently navigate the juvenile justice system as a youth service organization. Outcome data and assessments from these ten locations, including mine, are being reviewed and research-based practices are being extracted and broadly applied to other Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliates serving communities with particularly high populations of high-risk delinquent youth.

OJJDP defines “at-risk youth” as youth exposed to high levels of risk in their families, homes, communities, and social environments to such a degree that it could lead to educational failure, dropping out of school, or juvenile delinquency. Historically, this has been the population that Big Brothers Big Sisters has served. The Department of Justice’s investment in our Juvenile Justice Initiative represents confidence in our network’s ability to increase the number of high-risk youth – youth with present or past involvement with the juvenile justice system - that we serve across the country.

To date we have formalized high-risk referral sources, built resources for the larger mentoring and delinquency prevention field, and set up the infrastructure to measure the specific diversionary impact Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs have on at-risk and high-risk youth from juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drug use, truancy, and other problem behaviors. Some of the specific settings where high-risk youth could benefit from Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs that have been identified for preferred partnerships include: delinquency and dependency courts, probation, schools and detention and correction centers. Currently 103 Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies in urban and rural areas are receiving Youth Mentoring Grants to service system-involved youth, children in military families and children on tribal lands. The work with these sites will continue with an emphasis on extracting truancy prevention and intervention best practices as well as testing improved measurements of Big Brothers Big Sisters risky behavior outcome data. A number of National Juvenile Justice partnerships, including the American Probation and Parole Association and the National Center for School Engagement, have already been established to help drive network capacity to better serve at-risk and high-risk youth.

In 2013, our Youth Mentoring Grant allowed agencies to collect relevant juvenile justice data, rollout mentor and staff trainings specific to working justice-involved youth, and real-time

tracking of youth outcomes as they relate to risky behaviors and delinquency. In addition, Big Brothers Big Sisters will release a formal publication of best practices for working with high-risk youth and an analysis of the Juvenile Justice Initiative successes. Through the initial investment by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America has the infrastructure, data, and commitment to expand the Juvenile Justice Initiative to all 355 Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies and the 42,700 youth on Big Brothers Big Sisters waiting lists to better substantiate the necessary role of mentoring in juvenile delinquency prevention and share with the larger community the practices, data, and research to maximize impact.

In addition to our effective program practices, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is committed to ongoing research and evaluation of our one-to-one mentoring model. Big Brothers Big Sisters staffs an internal Research, Evaluation, and Innovation team and also consults with the leaders of America's youth mentoring research community through a 10-member Research Advisory Council. While the effectiveness of Big Brothers Big Sisters was established when Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), examined Big Brothers Big Sisters programs in its landmark publications in the 1990's, Big Brothers Big Sisters undergoes continued evaluation of our programs with the following OJJDP projects funded:

- Supported by OJJDP and the Thrive Foundation, researchers from University of Illinois-Chicago and Portland State University are studying an enhanced community-based mentoring model that incorporates a more youth-centered approach into the mentoring relationship by way of enhanced staff training, structured group activities, and more directed match support. Enhancements in this model are rooted in thriving and youth resiliency science.
- Supported by OJJDP, researchers from Portland State University and Boston University will study reasons for early termination of mentoring relationships.

Big Brothers Big Sisters will continue to use mentoring evaluation as a means to strengthen our programs and inform the mentoring community of best practices.

In closing, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America fully understands the legitimate pressure on Congress to reduce the scope, size and cost of government. However, we urge the Committee to view juvenile justice programs in general and youth mentoring grants in particular as small investments with big dividends. We ask you to keep in mind that the children we mentor today are the future parents of our grandchildren. If we are to be serious about the long-term fiscal and social success of our country, we need to ensure the success of our children today. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America sincerely thanks this Committee for its past leadership on behalf of youth-development and respectfully requests your continued support.