



**OFFICE OF THE HENNEPIN COUNTY ATTORNEY**  
**MARY F. MORIARTY COUNTY ATTORNEY**

December 7, 2023

Working Group on Youth Interventions  
Attn: Co-Chairs Commissioner Jeffrey Lunde and Alan Godfrey  
Legislative Coordinating Committee  
Minnesota Legislature

Dear Commissioner Lunde, Mr. Godfrey and Members of the Working Group on Youth Interventions:

As the Hennepin County Attorney and leader of the state's largest prosecutor's office handling the highest volume of youth delinquency and extended jurisdiction juvenile cases, I see first-hand the critical need for investment in a community-based continuum of care, including residential placements for youth who cannot safely be at home. Although the number of youth requiring residential intervention is not high, their needs are complex and the lack of appropriate placement options in our communities has led to an urgent crisis where youth languish for months in our Juvenile Detention Center, often decompensating while they wait to be accepted into a residential placement. And due to the lack of appropriate residential interventions in Hennepin County, our youth end up being sent out of state to placements across the country, which runs contrary to best practices.

Fortunately, there exists a clear answer and path forward to address this crisis. The research and evidence is unambiguous – we can improve both community safety and outcomes for individual youth and families by implementing solutions that include:

- Small residential placements with varying levels of security that are located within our communities;
- Step down options to support successful transitions back to living with family or independently;
- Deep and meaningful engagement with families throughout the youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system, including during any period of detention or residential placement (which ties to the importance of placements located in our communities);
- A continuum of care that wraps community-based services around youth and their families; and
- Licensing through the Department of Human Services for community-based residential services that ensures an approach focused on wellness and healing.

This approach is supported by extensive research and best practices from across the country.<sup>1</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Mendel, *The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010 (available online at <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-MissouriModelFullreport-2010.pdf>); Elizabeth Seigle, Nastassia Walsh and Josh Weber, *Core Principles for Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System*, The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014 (available online at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/juvenile-justice-white-paper/>); Richard Mendel, *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, The

is also supported by and aligned with a 2022 report created by Hennepin County youth justice system and community stakeholders entitled *Reimagining Residential Treatment*. This report's stated purpose is "to reimagine and recommend a framework that illustrates how youth services offered in a residential treatment center setting can and should be delivered." This report provides a wealth of invaluable information and clear service delivery recommendations, including a recommendation that:

Services will be delivered in a small, homelike setting in Hennepin County metro region, keeping proximity to the impacted populations' community and family to minimize trauma and maximize family and support system engagement. A range of security levels (secure, non-secure, day treatment, etc.) will be available to youth and will work as a "step-down" program, with continuous evaluation for the most effective environment / security level for each individual.<sup>2</sup>

At this critical moment, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. The alignment between these locally developed recommendations and national best practices provides a clear path forward. We must act with urgency to invest in these solutions and improve outcomes for youth and our communities through an effective community-based continuum of care.

Sincerely,



Mary Moriarty  
Hennepin County Attorney

**Hennepin County Attorney's Office**

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Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011 (available online at <https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-NoPlaceForKidsFullReport-2011.pdf>); Sarah Kuborn, Carol Kellison, Kristen Sobba and Darcy Robins, *Strengthening the Missouri Model of Juvenile Justice: Missouri Division of Youth Services Staff Perspectives*, Missouri Policy Journal, Fall/Winter 2020 (available online at <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=mpi>)

<sup>2</sup> *Reimagining Residential Treatment*, Hennepin County, 2022. Not available online. Attached to this letter for reference.

