



June 11, 2008

Representative Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U. S. House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman:

We appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony regarding our experience with the recent grant-making practices of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, as part of the public hearing on that topic.

The Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA) is a national, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to informed policy making on criminal and juvenile justice issues. The core members of JRSA, which was founded in 1974 to promote informed justice policy in the states, are directors and staff of the state Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs), agencies that collect, analyze, and disseminate justice data to address statewide criminal and juvenile justice policy issues. SACs exist in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and two U.S. territories.

For several years, working closely with OJJDP, we provided training and technical assistance to state juvenile justice specialists and program staff on improving the quality of their programs. This effort was carried out most recently through the online Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (*JJEC Online*), which contained a tutorial on evaluating juvenile justice programs, as well as resources to help practitioners navigate the complicated world of performance measures, program evaluation, and evidence-based practice. The *JJEC Online* site also included detailed information on 22 different program areas that span programs being implemented around the country, such as gang prevention and intervention, gun violence, mentoring, school-based violence, sex offenders, and alternatives to confinement. The project received widespread accolades from practitioners in the community, and we applied for a grant to continue our efforts to assist the states on June 8, 2007, in response to OJJDP's solicitation Number 2007-1633. Our proposed project was designed to build on our previous efforts by developing a self-assessment tool that could be used by states to improve their current performance measurement and evaluation approaches in the area of juvenile justice.

Along with other organizations that submitted applications in good faith, we assumed that the stated process—namely, one that was based on external peer review—would be carried out. As is now well known, there was a review process, though one conducted by OJJDP staff, apparently because the timeframe did not allow enough time for external review.

We received word via email on November 8, 2007 that our project was not funded, and were invited to request reviewers' comments, which we did immediately. Despite repeated requests, we did not receive the comments until May 7, 2008. In the meantime, the details of the review process and outcome became public, and we learned that JRSA's proposal, with a score of 98 out of a possible 100, was the top-ranked proposal. When we finally received the reviewers' comments, they were consistent with the high score. It is clear that the final decisions were made based on criteria other than those put forth in the solicitation and listed on the OJJDP web site.

While we are, of course, disappointed at having to end our role in assisting the states in improving the performance of their juvenile justice programs, we sincerely believe that the loss is greater than that. OJJDP's reputation has always been one of professionalism and concern for the best information that can be made available to researchers and practitioners in the field, and the recent events have compromised that reputation. Further, when the most highly rated projects are not funded, it is a loss to the community of juvenile justice professionals across the country who dedicate their careers to improving the lives of troubled youth.

We believe it is regrettable that this recent award process was not consistent with the high standards that have governed OJJDP in the past, and hope that the work of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee will enable the agency to resume the course it has always taken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan C. Weiss". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Joan C. Weiss
Executive Director