

Testimony
of
State Representative Audrey Gibson-District 15, Jacksonville, Florida
to
The Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Hearing on Oversight of State-Run Juvenile Correctional Facilities Known As
“Boot Camps”
December 13, 2007

I would like to thank my Congresswoman, Corrine Brown for the invitation, and the Committee for the privilege to come before you today on this most important issue.

As a member of the Florida House of Representatives Juvenile Justice Committee since 2003, and a degree holder in Criminology from Florida State University, the issue of juvenile justice is of particular interest to me, and continues to be an area of great passion and concern.

Today, I have been asked to focus my testimony on utilization of boot camps with an eye toward the following: Why wasn't proper research done prior to the implementation of boot camps in Florida? Why was implementation of boot camps without research bad policy? What is my personal stance on boot camps?

As to the question of implementation without proper research, unfortunately I cannot for certain determine the mindset of the Secretary of the Juvenile Justice department at the time, nor am I aware of why funding was approved by the committee which would have been responsible for reviewing the agency budget. It appears that several states including Florida, saw boot camps as a way of reducing incarceration costs as adult boot camps first, which in turn led to the establishment of juvenile boot camps. Boot camps offered a cost reduction as the “sentence” was for a short period of time, and a partnership approach allowed for the utilization of the facilities of another entity resulting in less expenditures for beds.

At the time Florida bought into the juvenile boot camp idea, roughly 1993, one was started which quickly escalated into six without sound collection of data, clear goals, and accountability. Even in a 1995 study of Florida boot camps by the State of Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, questions were raised as to goals, and no data was being collected on recidivism. However, as early as 1997, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, released a report largely showing boot camps as a relatively unsuccessful model of recidivism reduction, and that academic gains did not reach must past the walls of the camp.

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Knowing that outcomes were not favorable or not accessing data indicating such, continuing boot camps in the blind was bad policy in that the department's purpose is not only one of incarceration, but rehabilitation that works best to reduce recidivism.

Clearly if there is no sound basis for establishment or continuation of such a program, or there exists evidence that does not show significant positive results, then there is no precedence to neither implement nor fund such a program. To move forward then, is tantamount to jumping out of a plan without a parachute and is an ineffective use of public dollars.

Further, the establishment of juvenile "military" style boot camps, flies in the face of reason. **First**, the participants are children, and while they committed offenses they should not have, they are still developing children, who are being rehabilitated to return to everyday life, not war.

Secondly, many of those coming into the juvenile justice system are poor minority children, who most likely have not regularly seen a medical provider except for immunizations necessary for school. Therefore, physical or mental health deficiencies have not been evidenced prior to the implementation of rigorous daily physical activity. And while the boot camp was military style model, the health screening was not.

Third, while the Department of Juvenile Justice provided a portion of the funding to the camps, no training, nor treatment standards were specified in exerting control over the juveniles "farmed" out for service. And there are different handling modalities for juveniles as compared to adults.

Personally, I am opposed to boot camp models. Far better results have been shown in community prevention programs, in wilderness programs such as Outward Bound, and in multi-systemic and functional family therapy, than any boot camps have ever shown.

For many children entering the system, there are serious family issues which precipitated their contact with the department of Juvenile Justice, including foster care, abuse, molestation and a myriad of mental health issues. Boot camps and the brief fragmented after-care services, fall wholly short of offering children the full range of services needed to overcome such obstacles and come back to exist in a real world environment. I believe that our children are better served without them, and funding is better utilized in results based accountable, methods.

I thank you for listening.