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## **COOK COUNTY to END DETENTION of CHILDREN UNDER 13**

### **Cook County Board Approves Ordinance - Ends Detention of Young Children**

Cook County, the home of the world's first juvenile court, continues its leadership role with passage today of an ordinance ending the use of detention for children under the age of 13.

The ordinance states that placement of a minor away from his or her home must be the last resort and the least restrictive alternative available. This ordinance codifies existing practice in Cook County, which has ended detention of children under the age of 12, and nearly ended detention of 12 year olds. The sponsor, Commissioner Larry Suffredin, noted that in the rare instances when a child under the age of 13 needs removal from home, Cook County can utilize existing alternatives including emergency 24/7 services for youth at risk.

The proposal is consistent with national research, best practice, and with findings by the American Pediatric Association that confinement as a child has lifelong adverse health consequences.

Cook County has long been a leader in the development and use of alternatives to juvenile detention. Cook was one of the first sites for the nationally acclaimed Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Through JDAI, Cook County avoided adding detention beds when its detention facility became overcrowded in the 1990's. Cook County developed economical alternatives to detention, including staff secure shelter beds, evening reporting centers, home confinement and electronic monitoring. The alternatives worked – Cook was able to reduce its detention population from over 800 to the current level under 250, all while maintaining public safety. Research consistently demonstrates better outcomes, including lower repeat offending rates, from alternatives to detention.

As Commissioner Suffredin states: “This ordinance is based on the best practices for treatment of children in conflict with the law. It will prevent young children from being scarred by confinement in detention and leading to more problems later in life.”

The ordinance is consistent with a recommendation by the Juvenile Justice Initiative in a detailed report released last Spring on policy issues in the use of detention in Illinois. The report is posted on the JJI website at [www.jjustice.org](http://www.jjustice.org).

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