

Safety, Opportunity & Success (SOS): Standards of Care for Non-Delinquent Youth National Standards Development Process

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice's "**Safety, Opportunity & Success (SOS): Standards of Care for Non-Delinquent Youth**," ("SOS Project") is a multi-year partnership that engages State Advisory Group (SAG) members, judicial leaders, practitioners, service providers, policy makers and advocates to guide states in implementing policy and practices that:

- divert youth at risk or charged with status offenses from the courts to connect them to family- and community-based systems of care that more effectively meet their needs;
- eliminate the use of locked confinement for status offenders and other non-delinquent youth.

At the heart of the SOS Project are *National Standards* aimed at supporting key stakeholders who are committed to implementing optimal policies and practices to facilitate positive outcomes for youth who are already involved or at risk of involvement in the justice system for status offenses, as well as their families and communities. CJJ has convened an expert advisory group comprising key juvenile justice professionals, advocates, researchers and judicial leaders to assist in the drafting and vetting of the standards.

The *Standards* are structured as follows:

I. Principles for Responding to Status Offenses

This section of the *National Standards* provides a frame and foundation from which professionals working day-to-day with families and youth alleged to have committed status offenses can operate to achieve positive outcomes for everyone. In doing so, this section highlights 12 key principles to which professionals should adhere to protect youth and family safety, promote family connections and permanence, and ensure youth and family well-being. Collectively and individually, these 12 principles acknowledge and address the individual, familial and community contexts in which status offenses may occur, and underlie all subsequent Standards articulated herein.

II. Efforts to Avoid Court Involvement

This section of the *National Standards* discusses key principles and practices that shape how education, social service, community-based, child welfare, runaway and homeless youth, mental health, law enforcement and juvenile justice systems should first respond to youth and families at risk and in need of immediate assistance. They offer guidance to professionals on how to identify the reason(s) the child and family have been referred to them and select and deliver the best early intervention services that will help the child and family avoid court involvement.

III. Efforts to Limit Court Involvement

This section of the *National Standards* focuses on what efforts court system stakeholders should make to limit court involvement when pre-court diversion efforts have not produced desired outcomes. The following Standards offer guidance to judicial, legal and other professionals working within the court system on how they can use the court's powers to

ensure the proper services are implemented while avoiding deeper court involvement. They also provide specific guidance at various stages of the case to ensure best outcomes for youth and families, highlighting key principles and practices court system stakeholders should utilize along the way.

IV. Recommendations for Policy and Legislative Implementation

This section includes recommendations for policymaker to institute legislative, policy, administrative and budgetary changes that align with and support the implementation of the previous sections of the National Standards. This list of state and federal law and policy recommendations should be used by federal, state and local policymakers to help effect meaningful changes to status offense laws and policies. These changes can promote early intervention, diversion and increased and coordinated services and support for youth and their families. This section can also be used by policy advocates to support their organizational efforts to change state and federal laws, policies and budgetary schemes to support better outcomes for young people in or at risk of entering the status offense system. In some instances the policy recommendations below repeat the themes and principles outlined in the previous sections of these Standards, but with a specific focus on guiding law and policy changes.

For more information about The Coalition for Juvenile Justice's "Safety, Opportunity & Success (SOS): Standards of Care for Non-Delinquent Youth," ("SOS Project"), contact Executive Director, Marie Williams, at 202-467-0864, ext. 113 or williams@juvjustice.org.