

# A Better System for Status Offenders

## *National Best Practice and Case Outcomes*

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# Presentation Outline

- Presenter and Participant Introductions
- Status Offense Systems: Background
- System Reforms: The National Landscape
- System Reforms: Florida
- Wrap-Up

# Status Offense Systems: Background

# Background of Status Offense Systems

- Established in 1960 to help “disobedient” youth
  - Running away, truancy, ungovernability, alcohol/drug abuse
  - Non-criminal behaviors that constitute an offense only because of the juvenile’s status as a minor
- Uses family court to compel behavioral change

# Status Offenders?

- Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS)
- Children in Need of Services (CHINS)
- Conduct Indicating a Need for Supervision (CINS)
- Families With Service Needs (FWSN)
- Families in Need of Services (FINS)

# System Reforms: The National Landscape

# Key Areas of Reform

## ▪ **The Problems**

- Courts overcrowded with status offense cases
- Usage of detention
- Lack of immediate crisis response/service resources
- Sense that youth would be better served elsewhere
- Kids best served at home and in community
- Cost

# Key Areas of Reform

## ■ **The Solutions**

- Make court the last resort
- Provide immediate crisis response
- Provide services that are tailored, community-based, and evidence-based
- Avoid detention
- Track outcome data



# Make Court the Last Resort

- Court has been the historical entry point for status offenders
- Courts are generally ill-equipped to handle these cases
  - Overwhelmed
  - Can't respond to crises
  - Compulsion-based
- Turn that model on its head
- Find a new gatekeeper
- Use court only as a last resort

# Provide Immediate Crisis Response

- Families at the end of their ropes need response NOW
- New gatekeeper must be trained and equipped to respond immediately
  - Preferably in home
  - De-escalation
- Cool-down period, “time-out,” respite
- Referrals to services if needed

# Provide Services that are Tailored, Community-Based, and Evidence-Based

## ▪ **Tailored**

- No one size fits all
- Validated screening and assessment
- Room for flexibility and change in service plans

## ▪ **Community-Based**

- Accessibility
- Relationship-building

## ▪ **Evidence-Based**

- Services that are proven to work
- There are a variety of programs whose effectiveness has been rigorously tested and proven (“Family-Focused Therapy” (“FFT”), and “Multi-Systemic Therapy” (“MST”))
- If not tested, use other programs grounded in same fundamental principles and techniques

# Avoid Detention

- Does more harm than good
  - Environment
  - Peer influence
- Treating kids at home and in their communities more effective
- No crime committed
- Federal law (JJDPA)
- Jurisdictions around the country moving toward prohibiting altogether

# Track Outcome Data

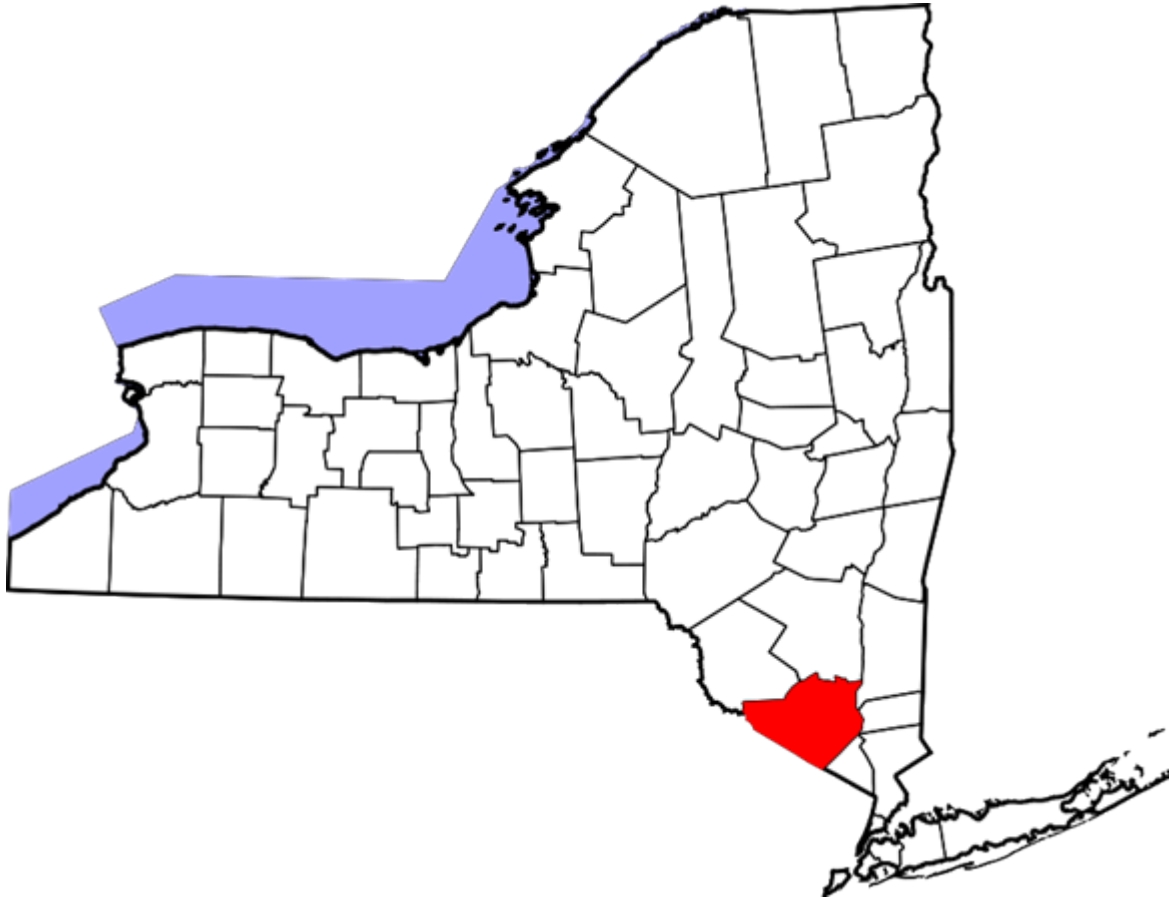
- Measure success
- Kinks are inevitable
- Measurement allows for thoughtful changes
- Sustainability
- Accountability

# Status Offense Reforms: The National Landscape

# National Models

- New York
- Louisiana
- Florida

# New York State: Focus on Orange County

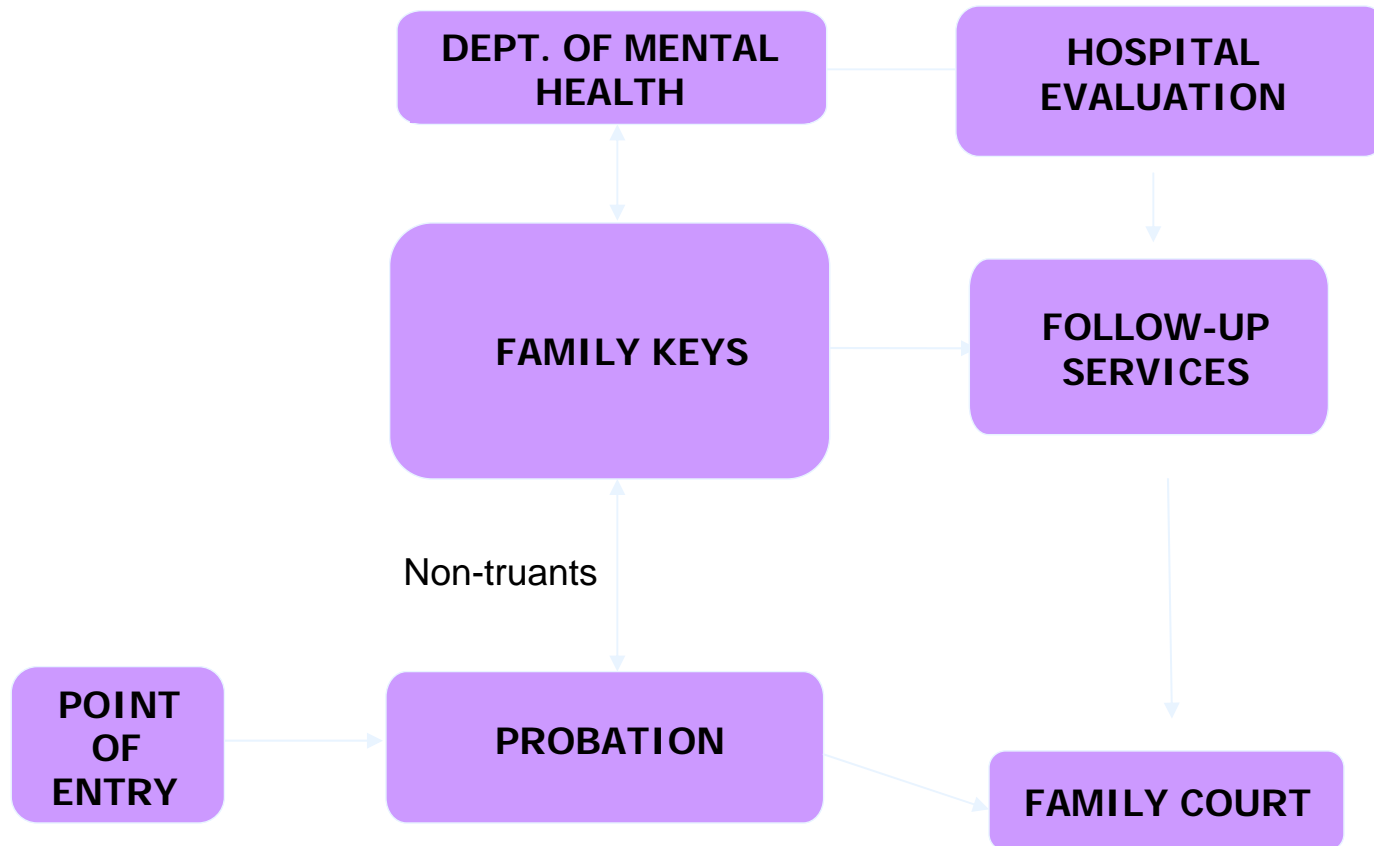




# New York State: Orange County Reforms

- Philosophy
- Multi-System Collaboration
  - Department of Probation
  - Department of Social Services
  - Department of Mental Health
- Contracted with Non-Profit
  - Family Keys
- Immediate Response

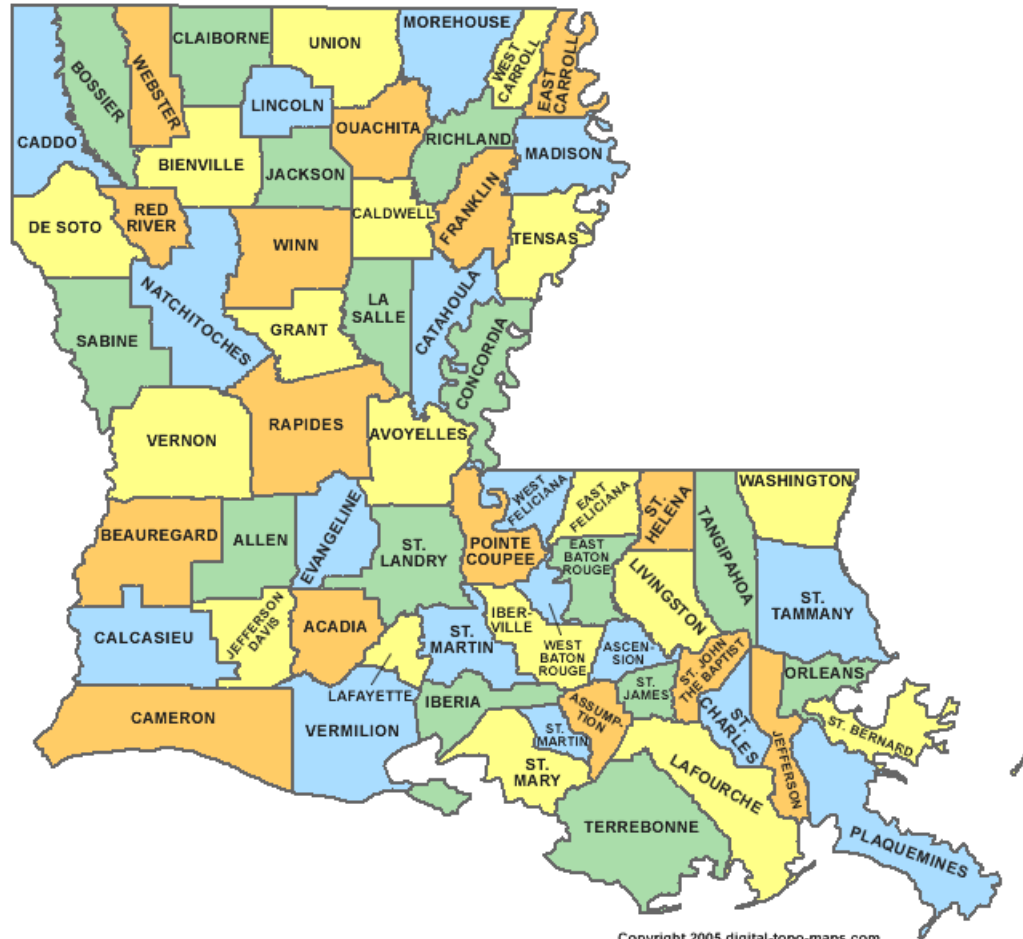
# New York State: Orange County Intake and Diversion



# New York State: Orange County Outcomes

- Between March 2003 and March 2008, Family Keys received 2,375 referrals.
- Of the 2,180 families who accepted Family Keys' services, 98 percent, or 2,136 children, avoided out-of-home placement.
- In 2007, the program served 396 families, with an operating budget of approximately \$422,000.
- The average program duration that year, from referral to discharge, was 22 days.
- 57 runaway youth were served by Family Keys in 2007, and all avoided residential placement.

# Louisiana: Models for Change Initiative



# Louisiana: Models for Change Initiative

- Calcasieu Parish
  - Fundamental Philosophy
  - Use of data
  - Creative grant writing
  
- Rapides Parish
  - Voluntariness
  - Contract length
  - School exhaustion

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March 13, 2009