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*On Good Authority* is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice program evaluation. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Timothy Lavery. It is a summary of an implementation evaluation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Provisions of 1998 conducted by the Authority for the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

The **Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority** is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice in Illinois. The basic functions of the Authority are criminal justice research, federal and state grants administration, and information systems development and support.

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## An evaluation of the implementation of juvenile justice reforms in Illinois

By **Timothy Lavery**  
Research Analyst

The Juvenile Justice Reform Provisions of 1998 (P.A. 90-590) made a large number of changes to the Illinois juvenile justice system and the Illinois Juvenile Court Act. Most of the provisions took effect Jan. 1, 1999. One important change was the addition of a new purpose and policy statement to the Illinois Juvenile Court Act, which adopted balanced and restorative justice (BARJ) as the guiding philosophy of the Illinois juvenile justice system.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority recently completed an evaluation of the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Provisions throughout the state. A major component of the evaluation was a survey of juvenile justice officials from different parts of the system, including police, probation officers, prosecutors, judges, and public defenders.

This *On Good Authority* summarizes some of the results of that survey, focusing particularly on survey respondents' knowledge and awareness of the reform provisions and balanced and restorative justice. Future editions of *On Good Authority* will feature additional aspects of the evaluation. Copies of the two-volume evaluation are available from the Authority.

### Balanced and restorative justice

Illinois adopted BARJ in response to concerns that the juvenile justice system was failing to meet the needs of juvenile crime victims and of communities impacted by juvenile crime. Traditionally, juvenile courts have been set up based on the assumption that juvenile offenders are misguided youth in need of care and supervision, and so are less culpable for criminal behavior than adults. If juvenile offenders are less culpable than adult offenders, the thinking went, then it is the responsibility of the juvenile justice system to protect minors so that criminal offenses committed while young would not ruin the chance of becoming a productive adult, while at the same time attempting to address the factors that caused the criminal behavior.

BARJ proponents agree that the juvenile justice system should assist juvenile offenders by addressing the factors that cause criminal behavior. But they also contend that by strongly emphasizing protection the traditional juvenile justice system has tended to exclude victims and the community from the juvenile justice system. Because of this exclusion,

juvenile offenders typically have not been held directly accountable to the victims and communities that they harmed through their criminal behavior. BARJ encourages programs that have juvenile offenders provide direct reparations to victims and to the community. Such programs often allow victims and the community to become directly involved in the process of determining juvenile dispositions.

The reform provisions added new sections to the Illinois Juvenile Court Act to encourage more community involvement in the juvenile justice system and have juvenile case dispositions place more emphasis on reparations. New sections were added encouraging counties to convene juvenile justice councils, develop teen court programs, and develop community mediation programs. These new sections are consistent with the principles of BARJ.

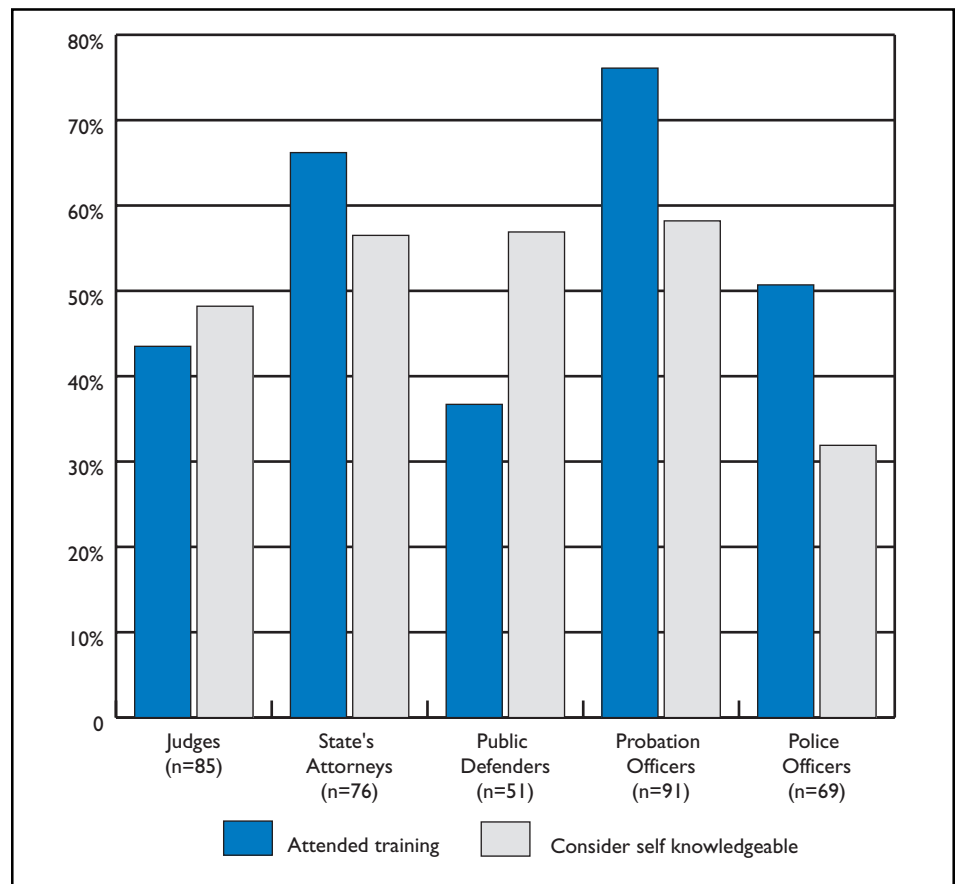
### Implementation evaluation

The Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission provided funding to the Authority to evaluate the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Reform Provisions. One component of the evaluation involved administering a survey on the reform provisions to the following types of juvenile justice professionals throughout Illinois: juvenile court judges who hear delinquency cases; state’s attorneys or assistant state’s attorneys who prosecute juvenile cases; public defenders with juvenile caseloads; juvenile probation officers; and juvenile police officers. Surveys were administered during the spring and summer of 2000.

This *On Good Authority* describes survey results pertaining to: (1) overall knowledge of the reform provisions; (2) overall knowledge of BARJ; (3) the perceived purpose of the reform provisions; (4) juvenile justice councils; and (5) teen court and community mediation programs.

Figure 1

Overall knowledge of the reform provisions by profession



### Overall knowledge of the reform provisions and BARJ

All surveys included two questions intended to assess overall knowledge of the reform provisions and two questions intended to assess overall knowledge of BARJ.

Juvenile justice professionals were asked whether they have attended any reform provision training sessions and to respond to the statement “I consider myself knowledgeable on the reform provisions” (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree). Juvenile justice professionals also were asked whether they have attended any BARJ training sessions and to respond to the statement “I consider myself knowledgeable about BARJ” (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree). Figure 1 shows responses to questions on the reform provisions. Figure 2 shows responses

to questions on BARJ. Both figures show the percentage of juvenile justice professionals who reported that they attended at least one training session and the percentage of juvenile justice professionals who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about being knowledgeable.

The numbers in parenthesis (n=) below the professions in Figures 1 and 2 reflect the number of individuals in each profession who completed the survey. There were a small number of professionals who did not respond to the training session questions.

Surveys were sent to the appropriate agencies or juvenile courts in each of Illinois’ 102 counties, but because of the large number of police agencies in the state, only a random sample of juvenile police officers were sent surveys. That difference should be kept in mind when making compari-

sons between police and other professions in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 shows that of the various professions, probation officers were most likely to have attended a reform provision training session, followed by state’s attorneys. Fewer than 60 percent of the respondents from each profession strongly agreed or agreed that they were knowledgeable on the reform provisions. Figure 2 shows a similar pattern of results for overall knowledge of BARJ. A statistical analysis showed that across all professions there was a strong relationship between responses to the statement “I consider myself knowledgeable on the reform provisions,” and the statement “I consider myself knowledgeable about BARJ.” In other words, juvenile justice professionals who considered themselves knowledgeable on the reform provisions also considered themselves knowledgeable on BARJ.

Overall, results from Figures 1 and 2 suggest that there are a number of juvenile justice professionals in Illinois who have little knowledge of the reform provisions and BARJ.

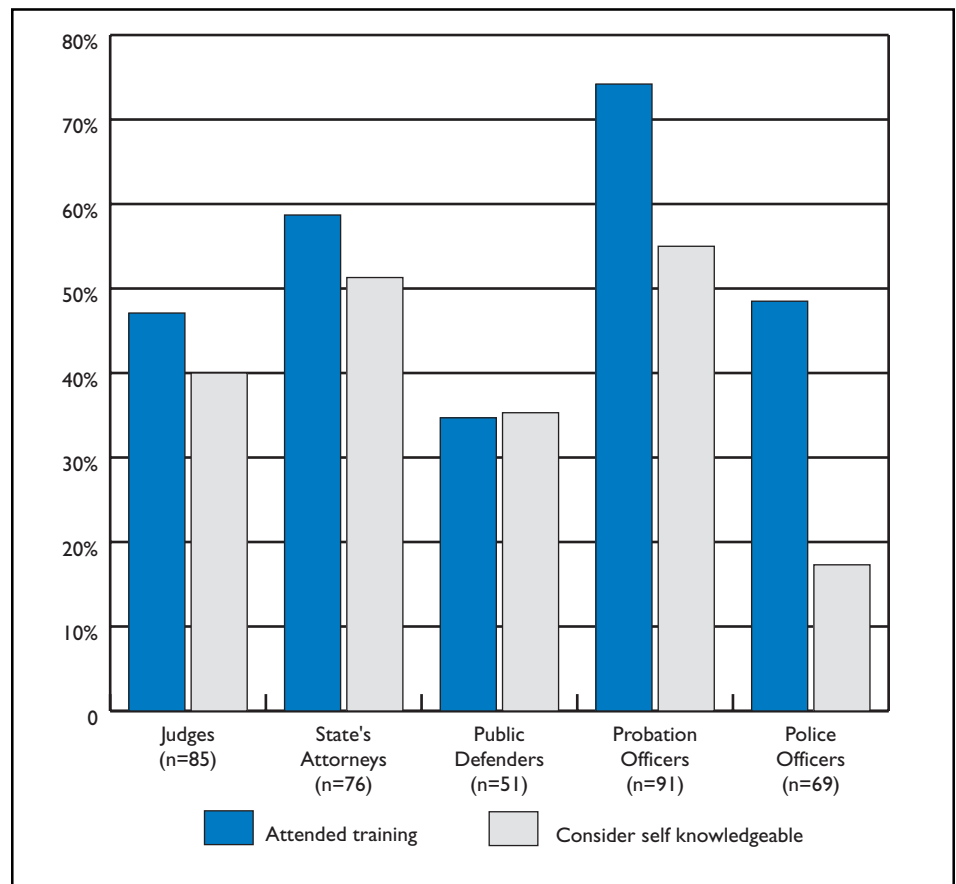
### Perceived purpose of the reform provisions

Juvenile justice professionals were asked an open-ended question about the purpose of the reform provisions, and individuals could give more than one response.

The most frequent response to this question was that the purpose of the reform provisions was to punish juvenile offenders or to make them accountable for their actions. The second most common type of response given by juvenile justice professionals was that the reform provisions were intended to implement BARJ or aspects of BARJ (helping victims, involving victims in the juvenile justice system, or involving the community in the juvenile justice system).

In actuality, the reform provisions are a mix of BARJ-related changes, punishment/accountability-related

**Figure 2**  
Overall knowledge of BARJ by profession



changes, and changes that seem neither purely BARJ nor punishment/accountability-related. Many juvenile justice professionals gave more than one response to the question, suggesting that they tend to recognize that the reform provisions are intended to serve more than one purpose.

### Juvenile justice councils

Juvenile justice councils are collaborative groups of juvenile justice professionals and other individuals who come together to address juvenile crime in their county. The duties and responsibilities of juvenile justice councils include developing a juvenile justice plan for addressing juvenile crime, and developing a local resource guide listing services available for minors. The juvenile justice councils can serve as a venue for involving the community in the juvenile justice system and as a

vehicle for adopting BARJ as the philosophy guiding their local juvenile justice system.

State’s attorney surveys included a question asking whether their county had convened a juvenile justice council. Only 17 of 76 state’s attorneys responded affirmatively. Approximately one year after survey collection, the Authority learned of 12 additional counties that had convened juvenile justice councils, raising the total to 29 (28.4 percent of Illinois’ 102 counties). Of the 17 state’s attorneys who reported on the survey that their county has convened a juvenile justice council, very few reported that their council had developed a juvenile justice plan or a local resource guide.

Authority research staff recently held a series of workshops throughout Illinois targeting juvenile justice council members. Discussions during these

workshops indicated that council members seem uncertain how best to go about fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, both from a technical and financial standpoint. These uncertainties may partially explain why few juvenile justice councils have completed juvenile justice plans or local resource guides.

### Teen court and community mediation programs

In teen court programs, peer volunteers rather than adults typically determine juvenile dispositions. Adults, however, supervise the proceedings and provide the minors with dispositional alternatives. Similarly, in community mediation programs community members, not judges, determine juvenile dispositions. Teen court programs and community mediation programs can be developed in a manner consistent with BARJ by helping minors learn the impact that

their actions have had on the victim and the community, and providing BARJ-consistent dispositions.

State's attorney surveys included questions on whether teen court and community mediation programs had been developed in their county. Only 15 of 76 state's attorneys reported that their county had developed a teen court program and only five of 76 state's attorneys reported that their county had developed a community mediation program. Several state's attorneys reported that their county was planning on developing one of these types of programs in the future. Of the state's attorneys who reported that a teen court or community mediation program had been developed in their county, only a few reported that the program had been developed directly as a result of the reform provisions. On the whole, it appears as if the new sections in the Illinois Juvenile Court Act encouraging counties to develop teen

court and community mediation programs have not resulted in a large proliferation of these types of programs.

### Conclusion

The results of the Authority's evaluation suggest that the reform provisions have not made a large impact on the everyday activities of juvenile justice professionals. A number of juvenile justice professionals are unfamiliar with the reform provisions and BARJ. Some juvenile justice professionals, when asked about the purpose of the reform provisions, may be focusing on the punishment or accountability aspects of the reform provisions to the exclusion of the aspects of the reform provisions that are consistent with BARJ. A minority of Illinois counties have convened juvenile justice councils or developed teen courts or community mediation programs as a result of the reform provisions. ♦

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Criminal Justice Information Authority  
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Chicago, Illinois 60606  
312-793-8550, TDD: 312-793-4170, Fax: 312-793-8422  
[www.icjia.state.il.us](http://www.icjia.state.il.us)