

The attached material is cited in *Grimes v. D.C.*, No. 13-7038, slip op. at 4 (D.C. Cir. July 21, 2015); (citing , James Forman Jr. & Reid H. Weingarten, *New Hope at Oak Hill*, Wash. Post, Dec. 24, 2007, available on 7/21/15 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/12/23/AR2007122302072.html>).

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## New Hope at Oak Hill

By James Forman Jr. and Reid H. Weingarten  
Monday, December 24, 2007

For the past two decades, the District's juvenile justice system has been a source of shame. Rats and roaches infested Oak Hill, the facility that housed adolescent offenders, and a court-appointed monitor found snakes in hallways and in residents' beds. Youths assaulted staff, and staff assaulted youths. Drugs, alcohol and weapons were easy to find. Escapes were common.

Post editorials chronicled the dysfunction over the years. In 1988, The Post chastised the District for ignoring long-standing problems and creating "a detention system that is little more than a warehouse that rehabilitates no one." In 2004, columnist Colbert I. King identified the same problems, including fights, drug abuse, rats and roaches, and broken windows. King wrote that "the District government -- through Oak Hill -- is aiding and abetting the hardening of young offenders by enmeshing them in a dysfunctional juvenile justice system that makes them, as one expert said, 'more apt to commit crime.' "

This is the system that D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services Director Vincent Schiraldi inherited in 2005. Understanding this history is essential to a fair evaluation of the department today. Schiraldi and the city face a monumental challenge -- namely, turning around a broken bureaucracy and creating a juvenile system that protects the community and rehabilitates teens. We believe there are three keys to this challenge.

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communities, with an emphasis on therapy, schooling and rehabilitation.

Missouri officials know that public safety comes first. But they also know that rehabilitation is one of the best means of protecting the public. By teaching juvenile

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offenders to address their past misdeeds, to read and to imagine a future, the Missouri system prepares them to become productive, law-abiding citizens. This approach works. Last year, Missouri's juvenile recidivism rate was 8 percent, while the rate in Texas -- which has a more punitive approach -- was over 50 percent.

Missouri, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch has said, has "the most successful statewide juvenile justice program in the nation." Wouldn't it be nice if the District could make such a boast one day, too?

Second, focus on education. School is where juvenile offenders spend most of their day, and a good education can greatly improve their life prospects and reduce their risk of reoffending. Despite this urgency, for years the school at Oak Hill was as much of a disaster as the rest of the facility.

Last year, after a competitive bidding process, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services chose See Forever, an organization we helped found a decade ago, to operate the school at Oak Hill. We have 10 years' experience running the District's Maya Angelou Public Charter School, whose diverse student body includes teens who have previously dropped out and kids who have been locked up. Despite their backgrounds, our students succeed in post-secondary education at rates that exceed their peers'.

How do we beat the odds? The short answer is that we focus on the three R's -- a *rigorous*, challenging curriculum, coursework that is *relevant* to students' pasts and futures, and meaningful *relationships* between teachers and students.


Creating a climate of academic achievement at a juvenile facility is not easy. But this past term, two juvenile offenders (we call them Oak Hill Scholars) who had once dropped out of school earned straight A's. Even more impressive was the reception they got from their peers at our academic awards ceremony this month. Offenders who had previously ridiculed school success were cheering on the winners and challenging each other over who would earn more awards at the next ceremony.

Third, know that success will be slow and unsteady. Miraculous turnarounds are the stuff of Hollywood. Young people who face significant academic and emotional challenges do not overcome them quickly. At Maya Angelou, even some of our best students have stumbled, temporarily reverting to behavior that landed them in trouble in the first place. But most of these young people eventually get back on the road to success.


What we have said about working with young people is also true about reforming systems. The change will not be immediate, and even in the best system, some offenders who are released will commit crimes again. This is not an argument against accountability. Ultimately, Schiraldi must be judged on results: his agency's overall success in reducing recidivism, maintaining security and improving outcomes for juvenile offenders.

But given the high turnover in the department's leadership over the past two decades, we believe it is too early to give up on a promising reformer. Instead, our city should support his efforts to rebuild this critical agency.

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