

GIRLS' INITIATIVE NETWORK
FACT SHEET FOR GENDER RESPONSIVE BILL 2015
“THE GIRLS BILL”

Senate Bill: S76, and House Bill: H82

An Act providing for an investigation by a special interagency task force relative to gender responsive programming for juvenile justice system involved girls.

Sponsored by: Representative Gloria Fox
Sponsored by: Senator Linda Dorcena Forry

What is The Girls' Initiative Network?

- Initiated by the Hyams Foundation in January of 2003, the Girls' Initiative Network¹ is a response to the problem of the growing number of girls entering the juvenile justice system.
- The long-term goal of the initiative is to promote positive outcomes for high risk and/or already system-involved girls and to reduce the rates of involvement and recidivism of girls in the juvenile justice system, particularly for girls of color.
- Currently the Girls' Initiative Network is focusing on Gender Responsive Policy, which: *Advocates for changes in policy in favor of a gender specific approach when working with girls involved in state systems.*

How many system involved girls in Massachusetts?

- ***Nationally:***
Over the past 30 years the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population has been girls (now accounting for as many as 1 out of every 3 referrals²).
- ***In Massachusetts, there are over 5,000 system involved girls.***
- **Department of Youth Services** – Approximately 100 girls committed to youth detention facilities.
- ***Youth Probation*** – Over 1000 girls on probation throughout the state.
- ***Department of Children and Families*** - 4000 girls with open cases, 1621 (ages 0-17) in placement.

Why focus on girls?

- **The criminal justice system was designed for boys. Girls are different from boys, which necessitates gender-specific responses for them.**
- Girls are three times more likely than boys to have experienced sexual abuse, which is an underlying factor in subsequent high-risk behaviors that lead to delinquency; 70% of female delinquents have a history of sexual abuse (OJJDP).
- Female juvenile delinquents are much likelier than boys to experience post traumatic stress disorder, suicidal behavior, disassociate disorder, and borderline personality disorder (CfJJ: National Mental Health Association).

¹ The Girls Network Initiative serves as a convener of the over 80 girl serving agencies through out Massachusetts.

² National Council of Crime and Delinquency: www.iamforkids.org/publications/front_burner/jj_10_17_2008.asp

- More than half of all girls in detention have reported attempting suicide (of those, 64% have attempted more than once). Risk of suicide for lesbian girls is three times greater than for heterosexual girls (OJJDP).
- 75% of the girls committed to DYS reported receiving services from DSS (DYS).

What is “gender-responsive programming” and why do we need it?

- Girls are entering the criminal justice system and other government institutions with very different personal profiles than boys.
- The issues girls struggle with as they go through female adolescent development warrant a decidedly different approach than taken with boys.
- Whereas boys engaged in risky behaviors are often externally aggressive, girls tend to internalize their anger and be self-destructive exhibited in such risk indicators as eating disorders, depression, dating/sexual abuse, substance abuse and prostitution.
- Gender-responsive programming intentionally allows gender to affect and guide services, through site selection and environment, staff selection and training, program development and content, and organization values and policies.³
- There has been growing consensus over the past 15 years that gender specific programming at all levels can have far more promising and successful results for girls involved in high risk behavior.
- States such as Oregon and Florida initiated a similar process over a decade ago and have seen remarkable results in terms of improved outcomes and reduced recidivism for girls, all while controlling costs.

Our Bill – The “Girls Bill” seeks the following outcomes:

1. ***Gender Value Statement*** - That the Commonwealth adopt a general value statement on serving girls.
2. ***Gender Specific Training*** - That all relevant state agencies incorporate gender-specific training.
3. ***Gender Data collection*** - That the Commonwealth collect data by gender among relevant agencies and makes available to the public.
4. ***Policies for programming*** - That the Commonwealth issue recommended policies, standards, procedures and criteria for girls’ programming.
5. ***Program implementation plan***- That the Commonwealth propose an implementation plan for incorporating those criteria within the relevant state agencies.
6. ***Bi-annual report*** - That the Commonwealth issue a bi-annual report on the status of system involved girls.

For further information, please contact the Girls’ Initiative Project Manager,
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³ *How to Implement Oregon’s Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Programming for Girls*, www.ccf.state.or.us