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Testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor: Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education Subcommittee; by Gregory J. Ahart, Director, Human Resources Div.

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Authority: Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended.

State and local institutions are authorized to receive educational assistance under title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended. Existing funding formulas give priority to institutions that serve youths who are likely to be exposed to educational services for a relatively short period and restrict services to the time that youths are institutionalized. Fieldwork and results of questionnaires showed that neglected youths are institutionalized more than twice as long as delinquent youths. After release, younger youths are more likely to continue their education. Institutions did little to assist youths in their transition to schools in the community and little was done by probation and parole officers or social workers towards educational assistance. Priority should be given to educational services for neglected youths who are likely to receive education for a longer time. This would require amending legislation to change funding formulas and establish criteria giving priority consideration to institutions serving younger children and emphasizing transitional services. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare disagreed with these proposals. (HTW)

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STATEMENT OF  
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HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
OF THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
ON  
EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR  
INSTITUTIONALIZED NEGLECTED OR DELINQUENT CHILDREN

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. We are pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the results of our work on the title I program for institutionalized neglected or delinquent children. Our presentation today will highlight the results of our work. We expect to issue a report to the Congress within the next few weeks.

The scope of our study included both State and locally administered institutions. State institutions are authorized to receive assistance under section 123 of title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, while children in local institutions receive assistance under section 103 of title I. Our fieldwork was done in California, Virginia, Kansas, and Pennsylvania, and within these States, we did detailed work at a total of 17 institutions for neglected or delinquent children.

We also tracked the activities of 170 title I participants for about a one-year period following their release from the institutions. The purpose of the tracking was to determine, among other things, if the children returned to school and what assistance they received from the institutions and probation/parole/welfare agencies.

And finally, we sent questionnaires nationwide to a sample of the more than 2,000 administrators of State and local institutions of which 80 percent responded. The purpose of the survey was to obtain national data on institutions and institutionalized children, and to obtain views as to the importance of academic educational needs as compared to the many other needs of the target population. The thrust of the title I program is on the provision of reading and math instruction.

The problems faced by neglected and delinquent youths are diverse and for the most part well documented. Results of our questionnaire survey showed that a large percentage of the youths are considered to have some type of handicap. For example, institution administrators felt that more than 45 percent of neglected children were handicapped in some way. The most frequent conditions they cited were serious emotional disturbances (32 percent) and specific learning disabilities (20 percent).

Additional insight on the problems of the youth can be gained from an examination of the reasons for the youths being institutionalized. The 80 neglected youths that we tracked were institutionalized for a wide variety of reasons. However, uncontrollable behavior, poor or deprived home environment, and family problems were the predominant reasons. Sixty-two of the 90 delinquents we tracked were institutionalized for burglary, robbery, theft, or possession of stolen property.

Given the enormous problems faced by the target population, it is apparent that educators of institutionalized youths are faced with an extremely difficult task. Nonetheless, we believe that the effectiveness of the program could be enhanced if available program resources were distributed on a more selective basis. In particular, priority should be given to those youths that are likely to receive a continuum of educational services over a longer period of time. At present, the

existing funding formulas in the title I legislation have the effect of giving priority consideration to those institutions that serve youths who are likely to be exposed to educational services for a relatively short period of time.

Under the title I program, services to program participants are restricted to the period of time that the youths are institutionalized, and this period of time varies significantly. Our fieldwork and the results of our questionnaire survey showed that neglected youths are institutionalized more than twice as long as delinquent youth, about 22 months as opposed to about 10 months. Further, a recent study of State institutions made under contract with the Office of Education showed that actual exposure to program services is even less. About 70 percent of title I students in institutions for the delinquent and adult correctional institutions are enrolled in the program for 6 months or less. Conversely, about 50 percent of the title I students in institutions for the neglected remain in the program for 10 months or more.

Beyond the institution, it appears that the younger a youth is the more likely a continuum of educational services will be achieved. Our tracking of 170 title I participants following their release from the institution showed this to be the result. The younger a youth was, the greater the likelihood that the youth would enroll in school after release, and, be enrolled in school and attending regularly about 15 months later.

Our tracking data showed that 26 percent of our sample, or 45 youths, did not enroll in school following their release from the institution and of these, all but 9 were 16 years of age or older. Further, the majority of these youths were beyond the age for compulsory school attendance. The most frequent reason given for the youths not enrolling was that they had no interest in school or they refused to enroll.

For the 116 youths who enrolled in school, only 12 percent of the youths 16 or over enrolled while 71 percent of the children 13 or under enrolled. Further, for the children 13 or under, 83 percent were attending school on a regular basis about 15 months after release.

The reasons that older youths do not continue their schooling following release are no doubt many and complex. In general, we found that the incidence of reinstitutionalization, idleness, that is, not working or enrolled in school, and behavioral problems increased with the age of the youths. However, a major reason appears to be that many do not want additional schooling. According to our survey of institution administrators, youths over 15 years of age are primarily interested in obtaining a job or receiving job training, rather than continuing their schooling.

Despite the many obstacles facing youths upon release, much more could be done to help youths receive a continuum of appropriate educational assistance after they leave the institution. In particular, the timely receipt of information on

items such as a youth's specific academic strengths and weaknesses and behavior problems can assist receiving schools in implementing effective instructional approaches. Such approaches in turn can have an important bearing on how well the youths adjust to a school environment and make progress.

Institutions were doing little to assist the youths in their transition from the institutions to schools in the community. Further, our tracking showed that probation and parole officers were mainly concerned with community safety and spent a great deal of their time on crisis situations trying to keep juveniles out of trouble. Social workers monitoring neglected children usually directed their efforts toward trying to solve family problems.

As stated earlier Mr. Chairman, we believe the effectiveness of the title I program could be enhanced if priority consideration were given to youths who are likely to receive a continuum of educational services over a longer period of time. We believe the longer that the youths are exposed to educational services, the greater the educational progress that can be expected. At present, however, the authorizing legislation has the effect of directing the bulk of program funds to institutions housing delinquent youths and older youths. These youths are least likely to achieve a continuum of educational services.

To redirect the emphasis of program funding would require that the title I legislation be amended. One way to accomplish this is to provide State education agencies a single lump-sum entitlement on the basis of existing title I funding formulas for children in State and local institutions. This would assure that individual States obtain the same amount of funding for children in State and locally operated institutions that they are now receiving.

Once State education agencies receive their entitlement, individual grants could then be awarded on a competitive basis by the State agency based on criteria to be established by the Commissioner of Education. Under present legislation grants to institutions are not made on a competitive basis. Criteria to be established by the Commissioner should give priority consideration to institutions which serve younger children and which provide services over a longer period of time. Also, the criteria should emphasize that adequate prerelease and transitional services be provided. Such services would provide greater assurance that the children receive a continuum of appropriate educational services following their release from the institution.

Mr. Chairman, HEW did not agree with any aspect of our proposal. HEW was opposed to giving priority consideration to younger children and longer-term institutions and was opposed to having institutions take steps to improve transitional services for youths upon their release.

HEW was of the opinion that serving neglected youth at the expense of delinquent youth would have the effect of ignoring those with the greatest educational needs and that services in the institution may be the last chance for the majority of these older, delinquent youths. Regarding transitional services HEW felt that in view of the wide variety of agencies currently involved in providing services for youth upon their release from institutions, title I should not be the vehicle for Federal assistance for the purpose of enhancing these services.

HEW in effect has stated that delinquent youths should be given funding priority because they have the greatest educational needs. The question of who has the greatest need, however, is a very difficult one. Delinquent youths are generally older and therefore frequently further behind grade level than neglected children, and for this reason, an argument could be made that they should receive priority in the provision of services. At the same time, we believe that an equally valid argument could be made that younger children should be given priority for the simple reason that they are young. In essence, why should they have to wait until they are older and further behind grade level before they receive priority attention? It may be better to intervene at an earlier age. Regardless of which group it is decided has the greatest need, we believe that neglected children tend to have a greater opportunity to make substantial progress than delinquents because they are exposed

to program services over a much longer period of time. Further, younger children are more likely to continue their schooling after release from the institution.

We do not agree with HEW's position that the institution represents the last chance for some older youths. Several federally sponsored or assisted education and training programs are available to provide services to youths and adults who have educational or skill deficiencies after their release from institutions.

Regarding transition services, our position is that such services can routinely and inexpensively be provided to help students make the transition to another school setting. We did not intend that title I become a transition vehicle that would compete with activities of other agencies.

Mr. Chairman, the remainder of my statement addresses that part of our work which examined the present thrust of the title I program--that is, providing reading and math instruction--in relation to the many other problems faced by the target population.

Two major pieces of legislation were enacted in 1974 which underscored the concerns of the Congress that there be a responsive and coordinated Federal effort to address the problems of juvenile delinquency and child abuse and neglect. The first, enacted on January 31, 1974, was the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the act were placed within HEW. The

second, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, was enacted on September 7, 1974, and the Department of Justice was given principal responsibility for carrying out the act.

It is because of this legislation, the many problems faced by the target population, and the fact that the title I program is the only Federal service program for institutionalized neglected and delinquent children, that we surveyed institution administrators to compare the importance of the need for academic educational services with other needs of the target population. The other services considered were

- health and developmental services,
- mental health services, such as social, psychological, psychiatric, and counseling services,
- vocational services,
- family services,
- diagnostic services, and finally,
- drug and alcohol abuse services.

In essence, our analysis of responses showed that while academic educational needs are felt to be very important, it is questionable as to whether providing services to meet these needs should be the exclusive or top priority of a Federal service program. The needs of the youth were shown to be extremely diverse and mental health services were felt to be the top priority of the target population.

believe, therefore, that the Secretary, HEW, and the Attorney General, Department of Justice, should examine and report to Congress on the appropriateness and/or the exclusiveness of academic educational services as the top priority of Federal assistance for institutionalized neglected and delinquent children. If it is determined that an academic thrust is not appropriate as the exclusive or top priority, then we believe the thrust of the program should be changed accordingly. Further, if it is felt that the desired thrust is not within the legal bounds of the title I legislation, the legislation should be amended, if such action is needed to bring about a more responsive program to assist institutionalized youths.

Again, Mr. Chairman, HEW did not agree with our proposed recommendation. However, the Department of Justice gave its full support.

HEW said that our survey of institution administrators was not broad enough to obtain an accurate picture of the success of the title I program and that the Office of Education has ongoing a study of the program which is broader in scope.

Mr. Chairman, our survey was not designed to make an assessment of the success of title I. Its purpose was to examine the importance of academic educational services in relation to the other needs of the target population. Concerning the study presently underway, its primary purpose is to measure the impact of the title I program on the basic reading and mathematics skills of the participants.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our statement. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.