

Justice for Louisiana's Troubled Children and Youth: Myth or Reality?



Presentation to the Sunrise Rotary Club

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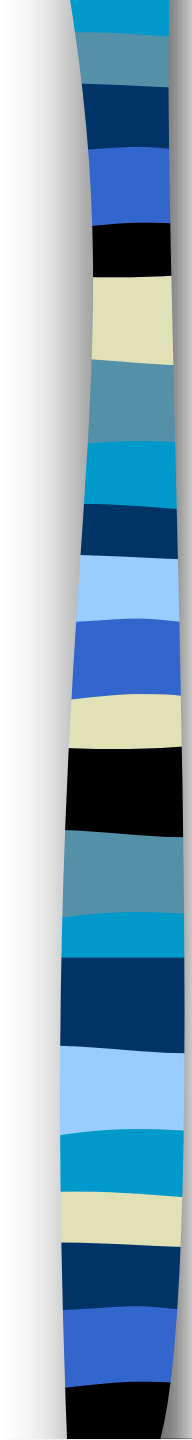
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For the past two years, Louisiana has been engaged in a large state-wide initiative aimed at creating a more effective juvenile justice system.

Today, I would like to talk about the reasons we so desperately need a more effective system for dealing with our troubled children, youth and families. Additionally, I will provide a brief explanation of our progress to date

Robby Life History: "Too Little Too Late"

12 / 1976 - 1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Birth - Age 4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

- Born premature
- Mother: low educational attainment
- Father absent
- Large family
- Poverty
- Poor and deteriorating neighborhood

K	1	1	2	2	3	4	6
Nicholson Elem.		La Belle Aire & Park Forest Elementary	Park Forest & Clinton Elementary	Clinton Elementary	Clinton & Delmont Elementary	Delmont Elementary	Prescott Middle (social promotion)
32 absences	29 absences	34 absences	43 absences	6 absences	25 absences	78 absences	103 absences

- Assessment**
- Mild mental retardation (IQ- 65)
 - Severe deficit in visual motor area

Mother says sibling hit him and he would not respond; she tried to teach him to hit back

Unable to read

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Future
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	

Criminal trespassing, entry/remaining after forbidden, returning to property without authority

EBR Detention Center
\$2,678.69

Christian Acres
\$2,925.65

Joy Home for Boys
\$2,925.65

Reynolds Institute
\$1,422.88

EBR Detention Center
\$1,350.60

Towering Pines
\$?

Baton Rouge Marine Institute
\$7,384.85

EBR Detention Center
\$360.16

Committed two murders with two other males

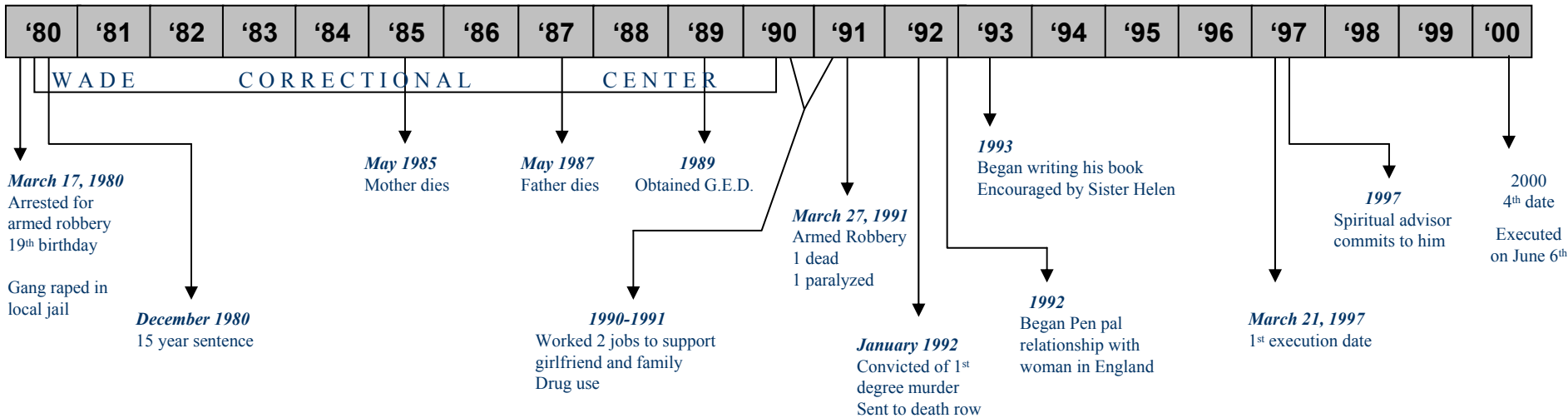
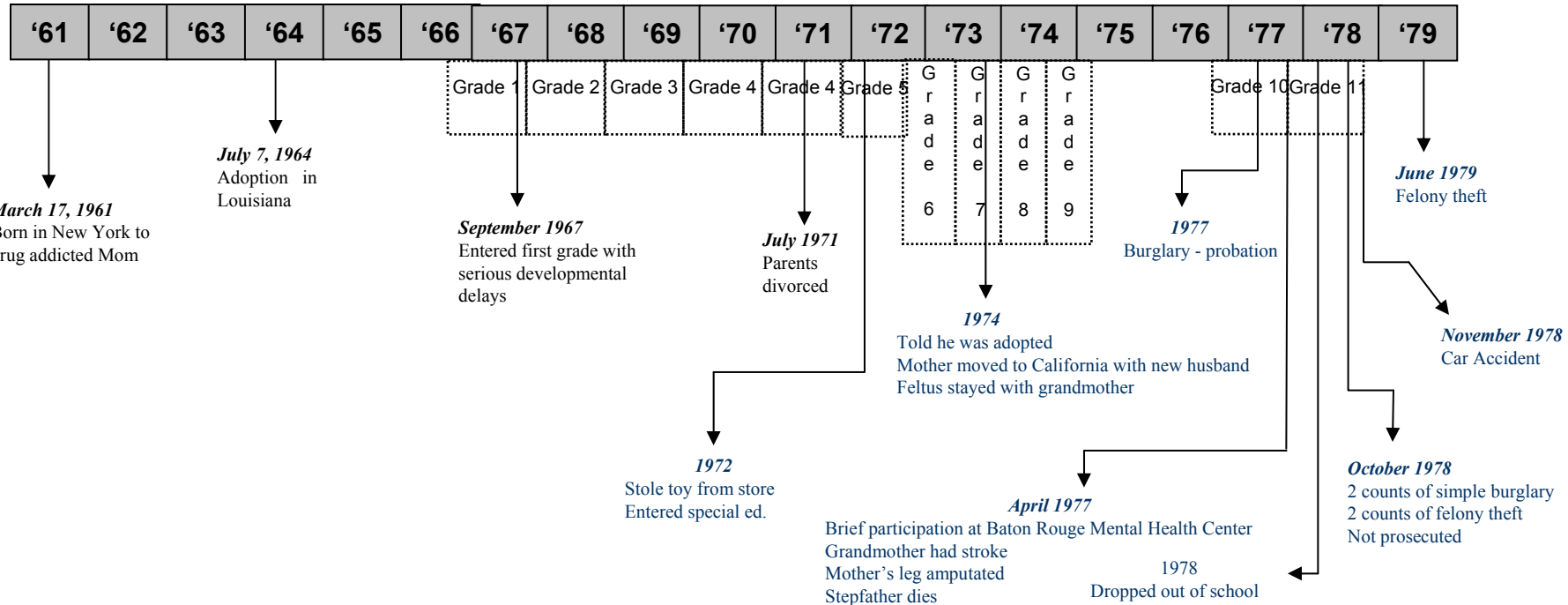
EBR Parish Prison
\$20,944.00

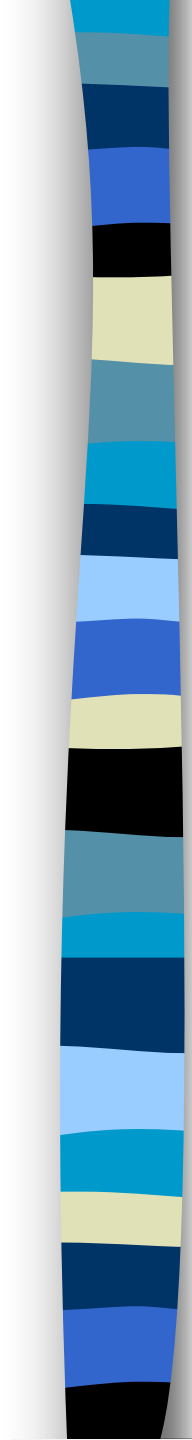
Sentence for first degree murder:
Life in prison

Louisiana State Penitentiary
\$25,125.66

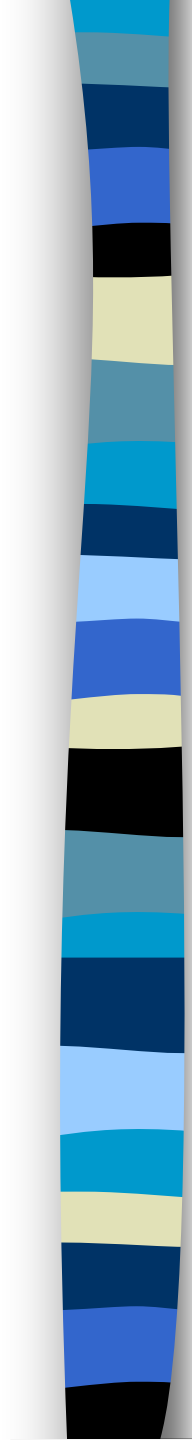
Eight placements in two years – notes usually read “not able to adjust”

Feltus Taylor Timeline





Robby and Feltus are just two of the children who grew up to eventually be involved with capital crimes in Louisiana. They were both born into environments over which they had no control. Although disabled, Robby and Feltus were some of the luckier children of the 100 social histories that I have compiled. They at least had someone in their home who loved them.



Like Robby and Feltus, there have been hundreds of Louisiana children and youth who could have been diverted from a lifetime of crime and victimization had there been an effective juvenile justice system in place. We have not had the type of system in place to help children who are born at risk for failure, non-productivity and criminality.



The result-----

Louisiana has one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation, a consistently high crime rate and the extraordinary costs to the taxpayer who must pay for this fiscal and human waste.



Louisiana....

#1 in murder rate

#2 in % of murders involving firearms

#4 in crime rate

It is no coincidence that we also rank....

#1 in state prison incarceration rate

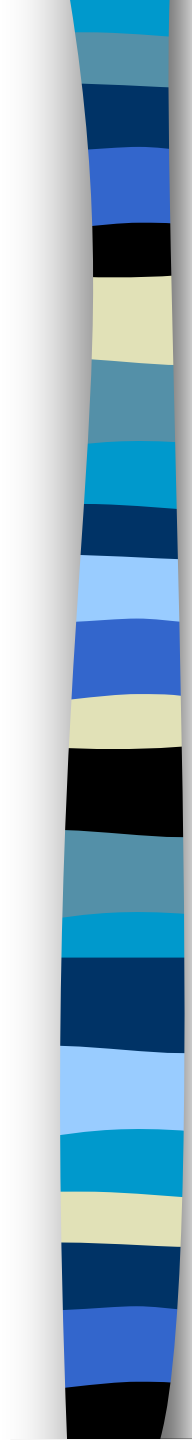
#1 in high school drop out rate

#2 in poverty rate

#3 in % of children living in poverty

#4 in % of families living in poverty

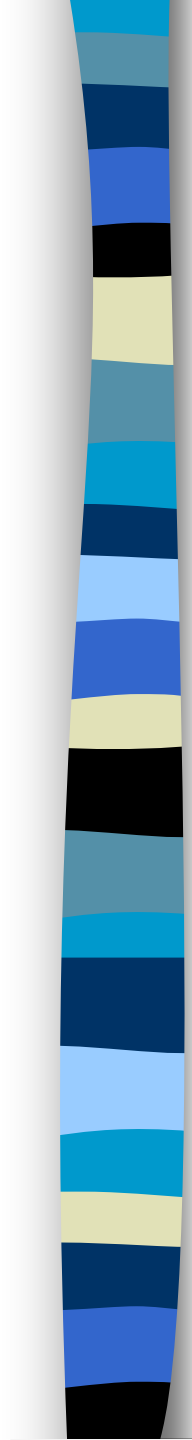
(Morgan Quitno, 2003)



In 2002, Louisiana had 100,754 adults and juveniles on probation, parole or incarceration by our Department of Corrections (DOC) [DOC Fact Sheet, 2002].

At a minimum cost of \$34 daily for adult offenders (DOC estimate) and \$157 a day for juvenile offenders (Casey Consulting Group, 2003), it is easy to see why the DOC budget continues to grow when other budgets in the state decrease.

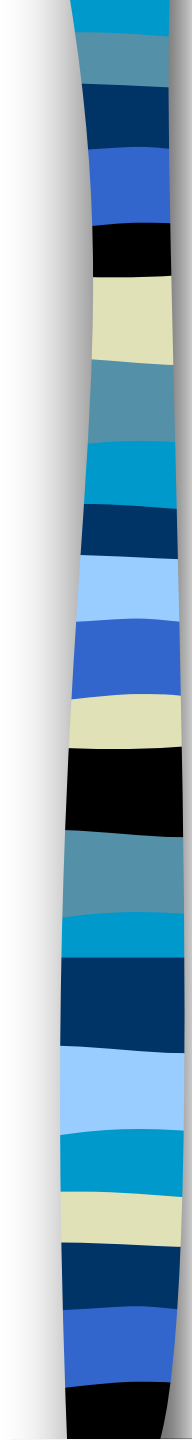
Spending \$157 a day would actually be great if juvenile incarceration prepared young people for a crime free and productive life, but our own DOC statistics show that of the youth who left our juvenile prisons in 1995, 72.2% have recidivated.



Louisiana is not alone in this predicament, although we rank much worse than the majority of other states.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates:

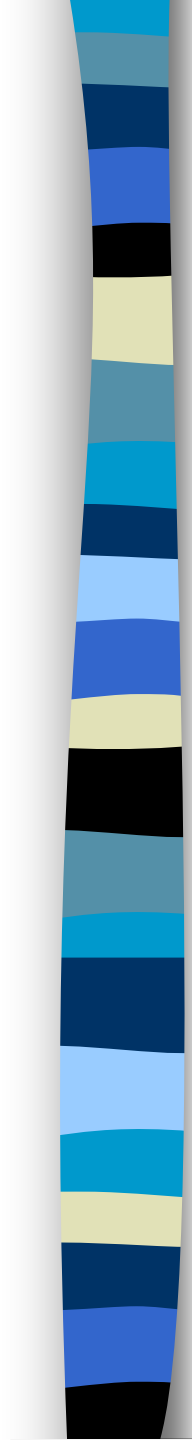
- There are 5.6 million Americans who have experienced incarceration (not temporary, but serious felony convictions).
- This means that 1 in every 37 Americans has been in prison.
- For children born in 2001, 11.3% of the males and 1.8% of the females will go to prison at some point during their life.
- 1 in 3 Black males born in 2001 will serve time.
- 1 in 17 White males will serve time.



Our policies towards the use of incarceration are completely inconsistent with crime trends. The crime rate is lower than it has been in at least 15 years, yet we continue to incarcerate in an increasing manner.

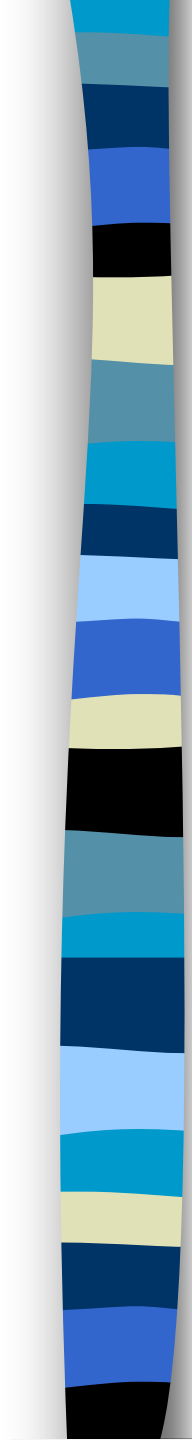
Regions in the U.S. with the slowest growth in prisons (NE and MW) had declining crime rates.

Regions in the U.S. with greater prison use (West and South) had increased crime rates.

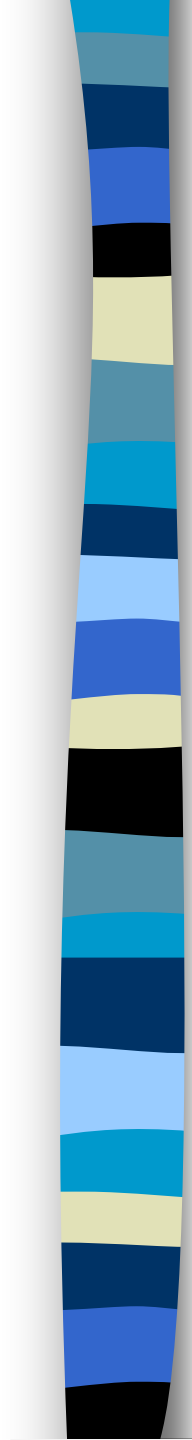


But, what has really caused our citizens, leaders and policy makers to reconsider the incarceration policies is evidence showing that the high cost of corrections and imprisonment is having a very bad effect on other fiscal needs. Prison expansion has come at a time when education and health care budgets are decreasing.

A 2003 report by the Nation Conference of State Legislatures reported that general budgets for education will decrease this year by 2.3% while budgets for Corrections will increase by at least 1.1%.



**So, is this how you
want to spend your
money?**



Apparently, our legislature decided they did not want to spend your money that way. The cost of juvenile corrections in Louisiana has skyrocketed over the past 10 years, because we shifted from lower cost community based corrections to high cost imprisonment for our juveniles.

A recent study by the Annie Casey Consulting Group demonstrated that 77% of incarcerated youth in Louisiana were non-violent offenders, with burglary being the most common offense. They also found disparities in sentencing practices based upon geographic locations, judge and race of the youth. Black youth were 4 times more likely to be incarcerated than White youth who had committed the same offense. They were also committed for longer periods of time.

The Reform Effort

The Human Rights Watch investigated the Louisiana juvenile justice system in 1995 and used the following quote to describe their findings:

“All my ribs were purple at EBR-LTI. A new boy came in and I tried to help him so he wouldn’t get beaten up and then the guard pulled us both up and he slapped both of us and then he told me to raise my arms and he beat my ribs until they were purple and blue and I didn’t tell my mom cause I know she would start something.

EBR, that’s a messed up place. The guards will beat you. One of them name Mr. O, he has this thing called a ‘house party’. If you work on the weekends he wakes you up at 5 A.M. He calls you in the back where we take showers and beats you for a whole hour. When we go to the mess hall to eat we have to count, and he tells you to come see, then he calls you into the washroom and beats you up and another sergeant comes to beat you. It has only happened two times to me...I would change EBR. [I would] fire all the workers cause they are just dirty. “New jacks” come in talking, and they beat them up for nothing. This boy at EBR with me, a guard broke his arm with a broom...[there were] boys lying on the floor and the sarge picked up his chair and threw it at him and hit him. If you tell a counselor, all it’s going to do is make it worse.”

Human Rights Watch: Children’s Rights Project (1995). *Children in Confinement in Louisiana*.



The Reform Effort

A 6 year Department of Justice investigation into Tallulah and Bridge City Correctional Centers for Youth was recently brought to an end, although I do not know what brought the investigation to an end. The investigation continues at Jetson and Swanson Correctional Centers for Youth.



2001 Legislative session-----

A juvenile justice reform effort was initiated in the 2001 session to begin addressing the problems facing Louisiana's at risk children and youth. A part of the legislative agenda was to get input from diverse persons all over the state. Numerous public hearings were held all over the state and testimony was taken from parents, teachers, victims, youth, professionals and all others involved in juvenile matters.



2002 Legislative session-----

As the problems of our system were discussed, legislation was drafted in the 2002 session, which dealt with the imposition of reform. For the past year, there have been a number of diverse groups meeting to try to come to agreement on what an effective system would look like. The groups working on the reform structure include law enforcement, the judiciary, state agency representatives, parents, university experts and community volunteers.



In all of these endeavors, the consistent points that are made about the system include:

- Must be community-based, driven by local community strengths and needs.
- Programming must be grounded in evidence based practices and treatment of the child within the family system.
- The agency dealing with children and youth should focus on all needs of children, youth and families and should be under one roof so funding and tracking could be coordinated.
- Only serious, violent and chronic offenders should be incarcerated.



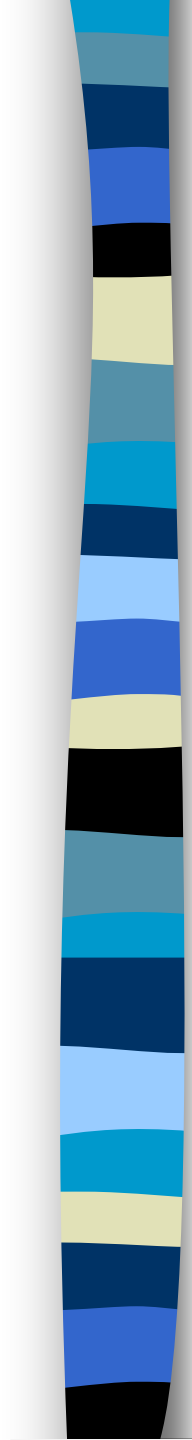
What is the status of these efforts now?

- Governor Blanco did sign an agreement concerning the major points of the reform effort when she was running for office.
- The success of the effort is dependent upon whether a new agency serving children, youth and families is developed—taking troubled children and youth out of the adult correctional model.

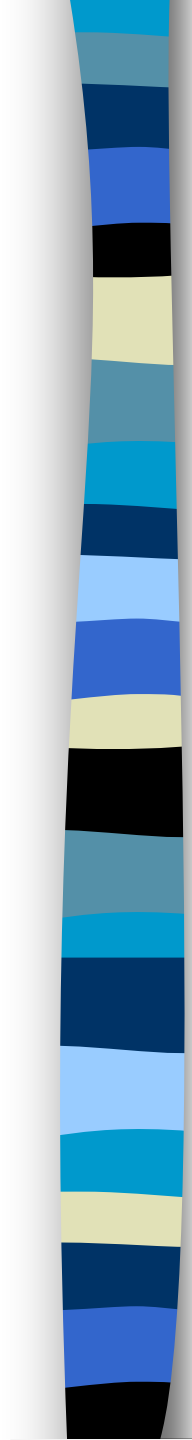


What is the status of these efforts now?

- The Sheriff's Association and District Attorney's Association want the system of care for troubled children and youth to remain within the correctional environment under the Foster correctional administration.
- Most child serving agencies, professionals, judiciary and community based programs want children and youth placed under one umbrella agency that will serve all of the needs of children, youth and families.



This is where the reform effort stands at this point. It is a critical point in our state in regard to reforming the way in which we have treated at-risk children, youth and families. Again, it is not just humane issues involved, but cost effectiveness concerns as well.



To close, I want to read you two brief excerpts from a letter I recently received from Robby and an excerpt from a book Feltus wrote:

Excerpt's from Robby's letter: (his words, unchanged)

“ Mrs. Cecile you know more about my life than anybody. If you have analys my life you can see that my mother and my father didn't pay attention to me.

I've never told anyone this. But the attention that I didn't receive from my mother and father, I went out in the streets looking for that attention. And the reason why I did that is because I thought my parents was going to ask me why I'm doing the things I'm doing I was doing. But they never ask me that. So I got deeper and deeper trouble.

My point is this, talk to the parents of the youth in your program to pay attention to they kids. Because if they don't they kids will go other places looking for that attention.

Mrs. Cecile I'm incarcerated physically, but not incarcerated mentally. I can help the youth and explore the world from in this prison and that's what I want to do. I'm not going to let my incarceration stop me from help somebody”.

Surely, if the prison at Angola can teach this youth with severe disabilities to read, write, study Islam, and learn good values, we could have done a better job at an earlier point in his life.

Excerpt from Feltus' book, where he is describing how he felt after his execution was halted 45 minutes before he was scheduled to die:

“I started to wonder, Where was Charles (spiritual advisor) when I was out on the streets? As a matter of fact, where were all of the people I now know and have come to love and care for, when I was on the outside?”

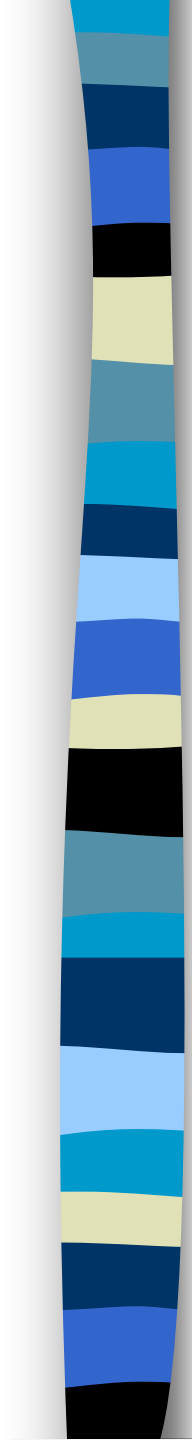
I mean, these people stuck by me through thick and thin. I didn't know anybody like them when I was growing up. Where I grew up, most of them were single parent homes with the mother trying to be the father, mother and breadwinner. With all of this work going on, the time a mother has for her child is limited. Where is the father? Maybe he ran out because he couldn't handle his job. But that doesn't do anything for the little boy who, at the time, doesn't know why his father left. Sometimes, that boy may even feel like *he* is the reason his father left home. Then he will start to feel unloved and uncared for.

Like I did.

And now I had people who stuck around, no matter what. *If I had known them then, I wouldn't be here now, I thought. Why now, and not then?* I decided to ask God about it when I met Him face to face. I had prayed about it, but I was confused, ever still. I didn't really know how to die this way.

But God knows what's best for me, I said to myself. If it is my time, I want death to come to me as my friend and not fear it at all. I believe God can and will help me with part of it.

As matter of fact, I know He will.



In looking at our troubled children and youth and the on-going efforts to reform our system of care—I can't help but wonder why we continue to wait to give people the attention they need to develop into productive human beings until they are serving a life sentence or placed on death row to await execution.

Justice for Louisiana's troubled children must begin at birth. This should not be a political and economic development issue—but it has become one. Justice for our children and youth must begin early and in our local communities. But it will only happen if citizens demand fiscal and humane responsibility for the care of the state's children and youth.