
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 422 Session of
2015

INTRODUCED BY FARNESE, GREENLEAF, FONTANA, COSTA, RAFFERTY,
YUDICHAK, BOSCOLA AND SCHWANK, SEPTEMBER 23, 2016

REFERRED TO JUDICIARY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2016

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to study the use
2 and effects of youth courts in the education and juvenile
3 justice systems, establish an advisory committee to conduct a
4 thorough and comprehensive analysis of the benefits and
5 effectiveness of youth courts and report to the Senate its
6 findings and recommendations.

7 WHEREAS, Large numbers of Pennsylvania's youths experience
8 early contact with the justice system and are at greater risk
9 for future, more serious contact as adults; and

10 WHEREAS, This contact may affect and limit their opportunity
11 to contribute to society as adults and imposes significant costs
12 on communities; and

13 WHEREAS, Research demonstrates that the adolescent brain is
14 not fully matured, which may contribute to bad choices and
15 behavior; and

16 WHEREAS, Diversion programs help youths make better choices,
17 reduce contact with the juvenile and criminal justice systems,
18 reduce future costs and assist with productive youth
19 development; and

20 WHEREAS, Youth courts have been shown to be a cost-efficient

1 and successful diversionary program in Pennsylvania and
2 elsewhere for decades; and

3 WHEREAS, Youth courts are student-operated disciplinary
4 systems that use positive peer pressure to correct disruptive
5 behavior; and

6 WHEREAS, Trained youths use positive peer pressure to hold
7 offenders accountable and repair harm; and

8 WHEREAS, Youth courts can be structured within a school-based
9 or juvenile justice-based system; and

10 WHEREAS, Youth courts keep at-risk youths in school, where
11 the youths continue their education and are less likely to enter
12 the formal juvenile or criminal justice system; and

13 WHEREAS, Youth court programs include public speaking,
14 creative problem solving and literacy and promote the
15 citizenship and socialization of youth court respondents and
16 peer volunteers; and

17 WHEREAS, Youth courts attract new resources, including
18 lawyers and volunteers, from higher education and faith-based
19 institutions; and

20 WHEREAS, There are more than 1,200 youth courts in the United
21 States, but fewer than 10 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties have
22 youth courts; and

23 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania's increased deployment and utilization
24 of youth courts and the creation of more youth courts could
25 result in greatly reduced corrections costs and school
26 disciplinary costs as in other states; and

27 WHEREAS, The Senate recognizes the value of youth courts as a
28 positive reformatory juvenile justice tool; therefore be it

29 RESOLVED, That the Senate direct the Joint State Government
30 Commission to establish an advisory committee of 21 members

1 consisting of public education officials, the legal community,
2 the law enforcement community and experts on the issue of youth
3 courts and juvenile justice; and be it further

4 RESOLVED, That the membership of the committees be balanced
5 so that it encompasses a wide range of backgrounds and
6 viewpoints; and be it further

7 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee contain the following
8 individuals:

9 (1) the Secretary of Education or his designee;

10 (2) a superintendent of a school district or the
11 superintendent's designee;

12 (3) a principal of a public high school or the
13 principal's designee;

14 (4) a principal of a public middle school or the
15 principal's designee;

16 (5) a judge or former judge in the juvenile justice
17 system;

18 (6) a public defender;

19 (7) a district attorney;

20 (8) a representative from the law enforcement community;

21 (9) a public high school teacher who has operated a
22 youth court;

23 (10) a public middle school teacher who has operated a
24 youth court;

25 (11) a representative from a Pennsylvania law school;

26 (12) two members who are former youth court student
27 participants;

28 (13) the executive director of the Juvenile Court Judges
29 Commission or his designee;

30 (14) a representative of the Pennsylvania Commission on

1 Crime and Delinquency; and

2 (15) six members of the public who are experts on the
3 issue of youth courts or juvenile justice or who are involved
4 in any other profession relevant to the issue of youth
5 courts;

6 and be it further

7 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission, working
8 with the advisory committee, conduct a thorough and
9 comprehensive analysis of youth courts in the State education
10 and juvenile justice systems, the issues set forth in this
11 resolution and other related issues as determined reasonable and
12 necessary by the commission; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission, working
14 with the advisory committee, review the following to identify
15 the best youth court practices, identify cost savings and
16 benefits from establishing youth courts in the education and
17 juvenile justice systems and to develop recommendations best
18 suited for schools and the juvenile justice system:

19 (1) youth court policies currently in place at schools
20 in this Commonwealth;

21 (2) youth court proposals and policies of other states;
22 and

23 (3) other resources on the issue of youth courts;

24 and be it further

25 RESOLVED, That the final report include recommendations to
26 implement necessary changes in State statutes, practices,
27 policies and procedures relating to youth courts, including
28 measures to increase availability of youth courts, and to
29 develop awareness, education and other strategies to address
30 issues relating to youth restorative justice programs; and be it

1 further

2 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission report
3 to the Senate its findings and recommendations no later than 18
4 months from the adoption of this resolution.