

Statement of Elisabeth Donahue  
Executive Director, *The Future of Children*, [www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)  
Contact: [edonahue@princeton.edu](mailto:edonahue@princeton.edu)

Thursday, January 21, 2010

I welcome this opportunity to share with Arizona policymakers key findings from *The Future of Children's* volume on Juvenile Justice. *The Future of Children* is a collaboration of Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School and the D.C.-based Brookings Institution. The mission of *The Future of Children* is to translate the best social science research about children and youth into information that is useful to policymakers and practitioners and to disseminate our findings broadly.

The Juvenile Justice volume is the culmination of 10 years of work by some of the top minds in the field of juvenile justice research. Meeting as the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, this group was led by Laurence Steinberg, the editor of *The Future of Children* volume.

With over a decade of research at its disposal, Arizona is poised to begin reforming its juvenile justice policies and implementing evidence-based programs today. While we often say "we don't know" or "we need more research" in areas of social policy, we actually do know about what works in juvenile justice.

First, a broad range of social science evidence about adolescent development and juvenile crime has emerged and is making its way into public discourse. Specifically, given the evidence that adolescents lack the emotional and mental maturity of adults, many argue that juvenile offenders should be given a second chance, offered rehabilitative services, while still being held accountable for their crimes.

Second, research has emerged showing that adolescents released from adult correctional facilities or boot camps are *more* likely to re-offend than offenders with the same background and criminal records but who were referred to other, less punitive placements. The more punitive the response, the more juvenile offenders reoffend – an assault on community safety.

Finally, we now know that it is not cost-effective to emphasize incarceration; the costs of preventing and rehabilitating are far less than incarcerating juveniles, which is a proven waste of human capital and money.

Reform of the juvenile justice system makes sense from all perspectives. We need to identify the most cost-effective ways to hold youth accountable for their criminal behavior, increase safety for the community, and spend tax dollars on programs that work. I look forward to a day of conversation with Arizona policy makers, practitioners, and advocates about this important topic.