

OFFICE OF DAKOTA COUNTY ATTORNEY
JAMES C. BACKSTROM
COUNTY ATTORNEY



Dakota County Judicial Center
1560 Highway 55
Hastings, Minnesota 55033-2392
Phillip D. Prokopowicz, Chief Deputy
Karen A. Schaffer, First Assistant
Monica Jensen, Community Relations Director

Telephone
(651) 438-4438
FAX: (651) 438-4479 (Civil Division)
FAX: (651) 438-4500 (Criminal Division)
FAX: (651) 438-4499 (Juvenile/Admin Division)
E-mail: attorney@co.dakota.mn.us

**Comments of Dakota County Attorney James C. Backstrom
Concerning a Recent
Evaluation of the Social Return on Investment in Youth Intervention and Mentoring Programs**

In March of 2007 economists¹ from Wilder Research (the research arm of the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul, Minnesota) and the University of Minnesota completed a comprehensive study of the social return on investment in youth intervention and mentoring programs in Minnesota. The economists found clear evidence that such programs can produce measurable direct benefits in areas such as improved school attendance and performance, reduced truancy, improved health outcomes, reduced juvenile crime, reduced cost of adult crime and reduced need for social services.

As to youth intervention programs, the economists' analysis, using conservative estimates, showed that for every dollar spent on a comprehensive intervention program for youth who are truant, using alcohol or drugs or committing other crimes, **\$4.89** in benefits was returned to society. Similar analysis of a targeted program aimed at reducing recidivism for property crimes showed a benefit of **\$8.18** for every dollar invested. Some youth intervention programs within Minnesota receive both public and private funding. The comprehensive program studied assumed a 2 to 1 ratio of public to private funding, while the targeted program was assumed to be fully publicly funded. Even if the cost benefit analysis is done only in reference to public costs of the comprehensive program, the economists found benefits of **\$2.33** for every public tax dollar spent.

As to youth mentoring programs, the economists, again using conservative assumptions, found that a youth mentoring program returned benefits of **\$2.72** for every dollar of resources invested. The total benefits generated by this mentoring program included both benefits to the individuals (the program participants and the mentors) as well as public benefits to society at large (dollar savings or added revenues for government). Looking only at the public benefits, the economists found that this youth mentoring program produced **\$1.87** of public benefits for every dollar spent.

Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom commented: "This comprehensive analysis of early intervention and mentoring programs for at-risk youth confirms what I have long believed: there is not a sounder investment of tax dollars available to reduce crime and promote achievement than funding efforts of this nature. Investing in our kids through programs such as youth mentoring, truancy intervention, chemical dependency treatment, juvenile delinquency diversion and restorative justice collaboration keeps our communities safer and promotes future success of our children."

To review further details and to learn how to order a copy of this comprehensive study, visit www.mentoringworks.org or www.mnyipa.org.

¹ Paul A. Anton of Wilder Research and Professor Judy Temple of the University of Minnesota conducted this research which was commissioned by the Youth Intervention Programs Association (YIPA) and the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota.