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Higher education partners with Models for Change to advance Louisiana juvenile justice reform efforts

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation credits higher education, Office of Youth Development, the Supreme Court, the Children's Cabinet, and local jurisdictions for state shift to "model" juvenile justice system

Baton Rouge, Louisiana— Initiatives by Louisiana's universities and other state partners are key to reforming the state's juvenile justice system, senior officials from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation told the Louisiana Board of Regents today.

Dr. Laurie Garduque, Program Director for Research for the MacArthur Foundation, appeared at the Louisiana Board of Regents meeting today to recognize the role of higher education and other state partners in Louisiana's "Models for Change" program, a five-year, \$10 million grant initiative designed to identify and accelerate promising state models for juvenile justice system reform.

"Along with the Office of Youth Development, the Supreme Court and the Children's Cabinet, Louisiana's university system is playing a critical role in building on the work this state has already accomplished to improve conditions for young people, provide for their rehabilitation, and promote public safety," said Dr. Garduque. "Thanks to LSU Health Sciences Center, UNO, and our other state partners, Louisiana is well on its way to building a juvenile justice system that is rational, effective, developmentally sound, holds young offenders accountable for their actions, provides for their rehabilitation, protects them from harm, increases their life chances, and manages the risk they pose to themselves and to public safety."

Louisiana's juvenile justice system has been transformed in recent years from a corrections model to one that is centered on the treatment and rehabilitation of youth. Last year, a U.S. district judge dismissed a 1998 federal lawsuit against Louisiana's juvenile justice system, citing substantial improvements in youth safety and treatment, as well as significant progress

toward implementing a milestone statewide reform strategy for the way the state treats its troubled youth.

In February 2006, the MacArthur Foundation selected the Board of Regents, in partnership with the Louisiana State University System, as the lead agency for the administration of the Models for Change initiative in Louisiana. Through this initiative, the Foundation has already awarded over \$3 million to Louisiana parishes and institutions, including grants to Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center and the University of New Orleans awarded in January 2007.

A significant focus of the Models for Change partnership with the university system will be to help implement new programs proven to reduce youth recidivism and promote better outcomes for justice-involved youth.

“Given the sociological and legal research capacity of our public postsecondary education system, and the geographic distribution of our campuses, we are in an excellent position to support this important reform effort,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. “We look forward to continuing our partnership with the MacArthur Foundation and continuing our work with the Models for Change initiative.”

Grants have also been awarded to the Louisiana Supreme Court’s Family in Need of Services (FINS) and Juvenile Drug Court programs, as well as to five judicial districts that include the following parishes: Jefferson, Rapides, Calcasieu, Caddo, St. Mary, St. Martin, and New Iberia.

To build on work already underway to improve access to effective alternatives to detention and formal processing in local jurisdictions, the Board of Regents, along with Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center – School of Public Health and other state and national partners, organized a first-of-its-kind state conference on evidence-based practices in April. Several nationally-recognized experts spoke at the conference, promoting the benefits of utilizing scientifically-based programs and practices proven to successfully intervene with youth in the juvenile justice system while reducing recidivism. The speakers also provided participants with first-hand advice on how to implement to such programs in their own jurisdictions.

Dr. Debra DePrato, associate professor at LSU Health Sciences Center – School of Public Health and Project Director for Models for Change in Louisiana, reported that the initiative is addressing some of the biggest challenges facing the juvenile justice system.

“In Louisiana, Models for Change is working to reduce the disproportionate contact of minority youth with the juvenile justice system, to increase the availability of evidence-based community services, and to improve access to effective programs and services that can serve as alternatives to formal processing, especially for those who need mental health and other specialized treatment,” DePrato said. She anticipates that new local jurisdictions and university partners will be invited to participate in the initiative as the work progresses.

Louisiana is one of four states selected to be part of the Models for Change initiative. The initiative is grounded in a fundamental set of principles shared by model juvenile justice systems. Model systems are rational, effective and recognize the developmental differences between adolescents and adults. The MacArthur Foundation recognizes that there is no single model or pathway for reform. Successful and reproducible system-wide change can only be achieved through a collection of approaches and interventions.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, headquartered in Chicago, is a private, independent grantmaking institution dedicated to helping groups and individuals foster lasting improvement in the human condition. With assets of more than \$5 billion, the Foundation awards approximately \$200 million in grants each year. More information is available at www.macfound.org.

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For media inquires, please contact Jason Ziedenis with Models for Change at, 510-332-6503. For more information on Models for Change in Louisiana, please visit the initiative's website at <http://www.modelsforchange.net/locations/LA/>, or contact Melissa Champion at 225-342-4253.