



John S. Foote, District Attorney for Clackamas County

Clackamas County Courthouse, 807 Main Street, Room 7, Oregon City, Oregon 97045
503 655-8431, FAX 503 650-8943, www.co.clackamas.or.us/da/

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As the authors of the recent [report](#) on the Oregon juvenile justice system, we read with great interest the two recent opinion pieces in the JJIE newsletter regarding our report.

The first [commentary](#), written by John Lash, suggests an open-minded approach to reviewing new data on system effectiveness, even if that review challenges commonly held assumptions. We agree.

The second, a scathing [review](#) by Richard Mendel, a longtime publicist for the Casey Foundation, while disputing the accuracy of none of the statistics in our report, attempts to contradict virtually every conclusion in that report, and especially everything critical of JDAI approaches to juvenile policy.

In fact, the Casey Foundation has enjoyed a long run of unquestioning applause within the juvenile justice community, and because of that situation seems peculiarly incapable of responding to criticism in a measured manner, as Mr. Mendel's reply demonstrates.

Driven by architects like Mr. Mendel, the Casey Foundation has for many years made increasingly grand claims about the effectiveness of their policies, claims which upon actual statistical examination are unsupported.

For instance, in his key 2009 Casey Foundation report, "Two Decades of JDAI," Mr. Mendel asserts that "there is substantial reason to believe that by steering substantial numbers of youth away from the deep end of the juvenile corrections system . . . JDAI is making communities safer in the long-term."

Unfortunately, statistics show otherwise, at the very least in terms of non-violent crime. In fact, 65% of JDAI sites in operation since 2007 or earlier have higher juvenile arrest rates than the national average. 58% have higher juvenile property crime arrest rates, and 67% have higher juvenile drug arrest rates. Additionally, since their inception as JDAI sites, 60% of these jurisdictions have performed worse in juvenile arrest trends than the nation as a whole.

Mr. Mendel does not dispute the accuracy of these statistics, but simply dismisses them as "unpersuasive." He makes no attempt to provide any reason why the vast majority of JDAI sites have significantly more juvenile crime than the rest of the nation, and how that fact squares with his assertion that "JDAI is making communities safer in the long-term." A reasonable person, however, might believe such statistics raise questions that deserve answers from the Casey Foundation. But unfortunately, few committed adherents of juvenile justice reform seem to have been much inclined to ask questions of the Casey Foundation.

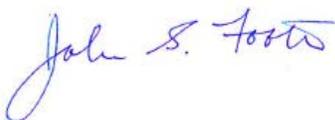
Mr. Mendel has in the past claimed "in addition to reducing confinement of young people and enhancing public safety, JDAI is generating substantial savings for taxpayers by enabling participating jurisdictions to avoid costs for the construction and

operation of secure detention facilities.” This broad assertion is supported by no study whatsoever, and it is difficult to understand how a serious researcher could make such a claim without any data to support it. The Casey Foundation, in fact, has never attempted to conduct a study of JDAI site budgets to determine whether public agencies are really spending less money under Casey policies. Our preliminary glance at state budgets in Casey states suggests they are not.

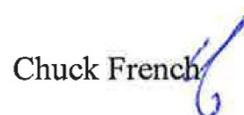
Our study has highlighted a number of troubling issues about the manner in which the Casey Foundation has managed to successfully promote its juvenile justice vision across the nation. In Multnomah County, Oregon, JDAI’s billboard “model” site, for instance, the juvenile department simply dismisses 60% of all juvenile delinquency referrals on the day of intake, with no further system involvement, either formal or informal, three times the national average. Fully 79% of all county juvenile theft referrals are closed at intake. Nationally, 36% of juvenile referrals result in court supervision, but in Multnomah County only 8%. Multnomah County is the face of JDAI in Oregon, and the Casey Foundation has promoted it as a model to follow across the nation, despite the fact that in the JDAI era Multnomah County has consistently had one of the worst juvenile recidivism rates in the state. Perhaps some healthy skepticism is in order here.

Mr. Mendel, ever the publicist, concludes his opinion piece by conveniently formulating for those who have not read our report what he claims to be our juvenile justice vision, “...the policies favored by Foote and French — widespread transfers to adult court, heavy use of confinement, aggressive prosecution, minimal use of diversion — were in the mainstream of juvenile justice practices 20 years ago...” One would search in vain, however, to find those conclusions in our report, because they are not our conclusions. Unfortunately, setting up and knocking down straw men, and demonizing critics as small-minded retrograde thinkers seems to be the stock-in-trade of many of those who defend juvenile justice reforms such as JDAI, and it is perhaps one reason why so few questions are asked.

There are a number of recommendations in our report, none of which come close to Mr. Mendel’s dark rendition of our position. We believe those recommendations are moderate and reasonable, and we encourage interested parties to read the report and judge for themselves, instead of relying on advocates like Mr. Mendel to paint the picture for them. But most of all we believe it is time to start asking some honest questions. Why are juvenile crime rates higher in most JDAI sites than in the nation as a whole? Why are juvenile crime trends worse in most JDAI jurisdictions? Why hasn’t the Casey Foundation itself studied these crime rates? And maybe most importantly, why is no one asking these questions?



John S. Foote, District Attorney
Clackamas County



Chuck French
Deputy DA (Retired)
Multnomah County