

PRESS RELEASE

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**JUVENILE LAW CENTER MAKES PRELIMINARY
RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERBRANCH COMMISSION IN
“KIDS FOR CASH” SCANDAL**

Harrisburg, PA (January 21, 2010) – Robert G. Schwartz, Executive Director at Juvenile Law Center, today unveiled the organization’s first set of recommendations to prevent another Luzerne County travesty. Mr. Schwartz presented his testimony to the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice, which the legislature established in 2009 to investigate the “Kids for Cash” scandal in Luzerne County, PA.

“The behavior of the judges and juvenile court professionals in Luzerne County eroded confidence in the rule of law, sabotaged the goals of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system, and harmed the very children the system was supposed to help,” said Schwartz. “In some ways it was an aberration; but its occurrence points to systemic failures that this Commission must address.”

Schwartz’s testimony focused on several critical breakdowns and shortfalls in Pennsylvania’s current juvenile justice policies that permitted an environment of corruption and flouting of the Constitution to flourish. The initial areas of concern include:

- Making the right to counsel meaningful,
- Ensuring a timely and effective system of appellate review,
- Opening courtrooms and creating citizen oversight,
- Using data to provide transparency and accountability, and
- Requiring professionals to fulfill their ethical obligations.

“Luzerne County was a toxic combination of for-profit facilities, corrupt judges, and professional indifference. It was the [Love Canal](#) of juvenile courts,” Schwartz continued. “We must work together to ensure that the Commonwealth’s children will benefit from the rule of law.”

Noting that some of the recommendations require additional state funding, Schwartz was quick to point out the enormous potential for cost savings. “Many costs can be avoided by the reduction of unnecessary referrals to juvenile court, and by reducing unnecessary institutional placements. Ironically, Luzerne County is also the poster child for how to avoid unnecessary costs: the County has saved millions of dollars in placement costs since Judge Ciavarella stepped down.”

Juvenile Law Center will be issuing a complete report detailing all recommendations this spring.

Juvenile Law Center is a national, non-profit, public interest law firm that advances and protects the rights and well-being of children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Juvenile Law Center is also a resource for other legal advocacy groups across the nation. For more information or to obtain a copy of Schwartz’s testimony, visit www.jlc.org or call (215) 625-0551.

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