

Some Thoughts on Judicial Leadership

By Judge Leonard Edwards (ret.)

The NCJFCJ annual meeting recently held in Milwaukee, Wis., was excellent. The Milwaukee area was perfect for judges and justice system professionals to learn together and enjoy and pleasant surroundings.

At the membership meeting, a resolution was passed regarding judicial leadership. Not many people know about National Council resolutions, what they say, how many there are, or why they matter. In fact, there are hundreds going back to the 1960s at least. Many resolutions recognize special contributions of persons who have helped in the work of the National Council, and some address policy.

This year, Resolution Number 6 deserves some special attention. It was entitled "Resolution Regarding Judicial Leadership in the Juvenile and Family Courts" and was passed unanimously by the membership in attendance. A full copy of the text appears next to this article.

This Resolution goes to the heart and soul of the NCJFCJ and what the organization is all about. It is the most important statement about the juvenile courts that I know of, except for Standard of Judicial Administration 24 passed by the California Judicial Council over a decade ago.

Resolution 6 starts with the statement that "the success of our nation's juvenile and family courts is directly related to the leadership provided by the juvenile and family court judges serving in them." Every NCJFCJ publication, every project, and every success of the NCJFCJ is related to this statement. Judicial leadership is the foundation of court improvement and of better outcomes for children and families who come before the court. Whenever I learn of an improvement in court practice, I ask who the judge was who either made it happen or enabled someone else to make it happen.

The Resolution encourages judges to be leaders and to take action. It lists eleven specific types of actions that judges should take, but that list is probably not complete and it is not intended to be. The verbs "provide," "investigate," "exercise," "convene," "maintain," and "educate" appear at the beginnings of sentences outlining actions judges are encouraged to take.

These actions are a far cry from the traditional model of judges deciding cases and no more. They reflect what successful juvenile

and family court judges have been doing since the creation of the juvenile court over 100 years ago. I suggest that the words contained in Resolution Number 6 be available to all juvenile and family court judges. A

copy should be on our walls or on our desks to remind us of the special role that we have in the juvenile and family justice systems.

NCJFCJ 69th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JULY 16 - 19, 2006

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Resolution No. 6

RESOLUTION REGARDING JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP IN THE JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURTS

WHEREAS, the success of our nation's juvenile and family courts is directly related to the leadership provided by the juvenile and family court judges serving in them; and

WHEREAS, in consultation with the presiding judge of the court system and to the extent that it does not interfere with the adjudication process, these judges are encouraged to:

1. Provide leadership within the community in determining the needs and obtaining and developing resources and services for at-risk children and their families. At-risk children include delinquents, dependents and status offenders.
2. Investigate and determine the availability of specific prevention, intervention, and treatment services in the community for at-risk children and their families.
3. Exercise their authority by statute or rule to review, order, and enforce the delivery of specific services and treatment of children at risk and their families.
4. Exercise a leadership role in convening, developing, and maintaining programs of interagency cooperation and coordination among the court and the various public agencies that serve at-risk children and their families.
5. Take a leadership role in the formation of a community-wide network to promote and unify private and public sector efforts to focus attention and resources for at-risk children and their families.
6. Maintain close liaison with school authorities and encourage coordination of policies and programs.
7. Educate the community and its institutions through every available means including the media concerning the role of the juvenile court in meeting the complex needs of at-risk children and their families.
8. Encourage the development of community services and resources to assist homeless, truant, runaway, and incorrigible children.
9. Convene volunteers from the community to work with and mentor and support at-risk children.
10. Be familiar with all detention facilities, placements and institutions used by the court.
11. Act in all instances consistent with the public safety and welfare.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges does support and approve this Resolution regarding judicial leadership in the Juvenile and Family Courts.

Adopted this 19th day of July, 2006

By the Membership Assembled in Conference

In Milwaukee, Wisconsin