



*Montgomery County
Office of the Public Defender
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Montgomery County Public Defender, District Attorney Announce New Program for Delinquent Youth in Partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA

'Back on Track' will change odds for local youth charged in minor crimes and stop them from returning to the juvenile justice system

Norristown, PA (June 24, 2014) -- Montgomery County Chief Public Defender Keir Bradford-Grey and Montgomery County District Attorney Risa Vetri Ferman have announced a unique partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA to help first-time offenders in the juvenile justice system improve their lives.

The program, called Back on Track, is already in place. It pairs Montgomery County children between the ages of 10 and 15, who have committed minor offenses, with volunteer adult mentors from Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA. These mentoring matches meet at least three times a month for at least a year and participate in activities they both enjoy. Youth in the program gain a positive role model and advocate, which are two critical pieces in preventing a return to the justice system.

Nearly 3,000 children in that 10 and 15 age range entered the juvenile justice system in Montgomery County last year alone. On average, one in five children will return to the justice system within one year of their first contact with law enforcement. The Back on Track program strives to change those odds for local youth. Not only does the program help youth in the area, it will also save Montgomery County thousands of dollars in incarceration costs. "It costs approximately \$179 a day to keep a child in detention compared to just \$1,500 a year in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA program," said Bradford-Grey, "but this program is about more than just saving dollars, it's about saving children."

Josh Shapiro, chairman of the Montgomery County Commissioners, complimented Bradford-Grey for her leadership. "I knew when we appointed Keir that she was an excellent attorney, but I also knew that she would bring innovative ideas to our justice system here in Montgomery County, and this is exactly the kind of program we envisioned," Shapiro said. "It has been famously said that it takes a village to raise a child, and that is what is happening here. Our community becomes part of the rehabilitative process, and while the savings are apparent, the successful outcomes are immeasurable, because we have saved a child."

Marcus Allen, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA, stated that the program, funded by The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency with additional financial support from the

Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, is essential for helping children in need and improving communities in Montgomery County. "The key is having caring and compassionate adults get involved and volunteer a little of their time to help our kids change course," said Allen. "Several children already involved in the program reported that they now have a positive role model in their lives, and all have shown positive results. This is an innovative project and Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA is committed to its success."

"Parents with children in the program reported a noticeable difference in their behavior at school and at home, and not a single child has reoffended since meeting their mentor," said Bradford-Grey. "We expect the impact to grow as time goes on."

Montgomery County District Attorney, Risa Vetri Ferman, stated that devoting time, resources and energy toward rehabilitation helps kids avoid the types of behaviors leading them to the criminal justice system. "All children have mentors, or people whose lead they follow. When children follow the lead of negative influences, they can easily find themselves on the wrong track. Our goal is to support at-risk kids who have made some bad choices early in life by providing them with the appropriate guidance necessary to get them back on the right track. The DA's Office is honored to have the opportunity to collaborate with our Public Defender and Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA to make a positive impact on the lives of children who need guidance," said Ferman.

The Back on Track program is actively seeking volunteers in Montgomery County to serve as mentors. The Public Defender and District Attorney will host a Call to Action Forum at Montgomery County Community College on Wednesday, August 13th, from 5-7p.m. to discuss program specifics for community members and social action leaders interested in becoming involved.

About Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania

Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA is a donor-supported organization that enriches, encourages, and empowers children to reach their highest potential through safe, one-to-one mentoring relationships. Volunteering as a Big Brother or Big Sister is about making a measurable difference in a child's life by sharing new perspectives and experiences; in Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties, nearly 3,000 children annually are more successful socially and academically because of the work of Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA.