



## **POSITION STATEMENT**

*Adopted by NPJS Board of Directors ~ October 18, 2011*

# **USE OF ELECTROSHOCK DEVICES IN JUVENILE DETENTION AND SECURE RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES**

### **STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE**

Juvenile detention and secure residential facilities are physically safe and secure programs that are intended to address the needs of confined youth according to their developmental needs. Those facilities are not meant to duplicate adult jails and prisons in how services are provided, nor should they be designed to serve a strictly punitive purpose. In order to adequately serve young people in juvenile detention and secure residential facilities, there must be a sufficient number of properly trained staff members who act empathetically and free of prejudice. Those facilities must also offer a range of helpful programs and services that are planned to offer rehabilitative, restorative and growth-producing opportunities. With well-trained staff members and a variety of beneficial programs, incidents involving physical acting-out on the part of youth in facilities are minimized and harsh and punitive interventions, generally based on an adult corrections model, are seldom necessary. When the safety and security of youth and staff in a facility do require the use of physical control techniques, that intervention should only consist of methods and practices that are designed for a juvenile population and which emphasize the least amount of restraint necessary to attain control. The use of such pain-compliant techniques and tools as electroshock devices within a facility that is already secure is not necessary.

### **NATURE OF THE ISSUE**

- Amnesty International has called the use of electroshock devices “inhumane” based on their research of deaths resulting from the use of electroshock devices.
- The United Nations has deemed electroshock device to be a form of torture.
- There is significant documentation in professional literature of deaths resulting from such causes as asphyxia, excited delirium and acute cardiac death, subsequent to the use of electroshock devices in correctional facilities.
- Certain risk factors make many individuals more at-risk of harm when electroshock devices are used on them. Staff in juvenile detention and secure residential facilities may not know if the young people in their facilities have such risk factors.

- Electroshock device policies for law enforcement agencies address such issues as storage, inspection and maintenance, physician involvement and training requirements, including frequency (typically annually) and amounts (at least four to eight hours). Juvenile facilities and their staff would secure greater benefit from training staff members on subjects specifically related to the needs of young people in the juvenile justice system including such issues as adolescent development, mental health issues, and verbal de-escalation techniques.
- The mere presence of electroshock devices in juvenile facilities sends a message to both staff and youth that such extreme measures are considered acceptable and appropriate and can heighten the likelihood that they will be used in place of less severe techniques for managing youth behavior.
- Young people in juvenile detention and secure residential facilities should be monitored and managed by well-trained staff in sufficient numbers to address both group dynamics and individual needs of youth. Electroshock devices and other tools to control behavior should not substitute for an adequate number of trained juvenile justice employees.
- A range of planned, organized and constructive programs for youth in juvenile detention and secure residential facilities offers opportunities for those youth to participate in beneficial activities and minimizes behaviors that could endanger themselves or others.

#### **POSITION STATEMENT**

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS) advocates juvenile detention and secure residential facilities have an adequate number of well-trained staff members and a range of helpful programs in order to serve those youth appropriately and to diminish the need for the use of force. The NPJS opposes the use of electroshock devices, in juvenile detention and secure residential facilities.