

## State funds to jump-start centers for prostituted girls

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To help young girls who have been prostituted, Georgia lawmakers have earmarked **\$140,000** -- far less than advocates wanted.

The Juvenile Justice Fund had sought **\$700,000** from Georgia's 2008 general budget. Its goal was to open a seven-bed regional assessment center and emergency shelter for sexually exploited **children**, possibly at Inner Harbour, a psychiatric hospital for **children** in Douglasville.

There, staff are experienced at helping girls rescued from pimps and others who exploited them.

Now the Juvenile Justice Fund, a nonprofit affiliated with the Fulton County Juvenile Court, is modifying its plans, said Kimberley Borna, executive director. It will create satellite assessment centers for exploited **children** in five metro Atlanta counties: Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Clayton and Cobb.

It isn't yet clear how many beds will be available for the **children**. The centers will be based at existing hospitals or treatment centers, who first must submit proposals to the Juvenile Justice Fund, Borna said. Few places exist to help sexually exploited kids, even though authorities call metro Atlanta a major hub for **child prostitution**. "This is a statewide problem," said Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta), who pushed for more state funding. "They're coming [to metro Atlanta], they're getting exploited, and those numbers are growing. The pimps and the procurers are getting smarter. As opposed to putting kids on the street, they're using hotel rooms, they're using the Internet. The bottom line is the bad guys are getting smarter, and as they get smarter more and more **children** are being exploited." Many prostituted girls end up locked in youth detention centers or back on the streets. One option is Angela's House, a group home in rural Fulton County, that the Juvenile Justice Fund owns. But the house has room for only six girls at a time, and they stay for up to six months. In five years, more than 90 girls, some as young as 11, have come to Angela's House for help. Some were runaways lured into **prostitution**, some were kidnapped and forced into **prostitution**, some were homeless and desperate.

"This is not something a 10-, 11- or 12-year-old can get over in a week or two," Fort said. "They need services, ongoing services." Once the satellite centers are chosen, the Juvenile Justice Fund will train staff at the hospitals and other facilities how to identify and treat minors who have been prostituted. The organization also will teach law enforcement officers and **child** protection workers how to contact the assessment centers to admit victims. Borna said she hopes the **children** will begin receiving services as early as July. Janice Barrocas, who lobbied lawmakers last session for the **\$700,000**, said she's pleased that the General Assembly allocated at least **\$140,000**. "The importance of these dollars is that it's the beginning of starting to address the need," she said. "You have to be able to start. So if you have to start small, we can start small."

Next year, the Juvenile Justice Fund will seek \$700,**000** from the General Assembly again, Borna said. By then, the organization will be able to support its request with data from the new satellite centers about the need for services for **children** who have been prostituted, she said.

#### SILENT AUCTION

A silent auction fund- raiser, with food and live music, for the nonprofit Juvenile Justice Fund is planned for 6 p.m. June 12 in the garden courtyard of Fulton County Juvenile Court, 395 Pryor St. S.W., Atlanta. The organization is seeking donations of \$75 per person. For more information, call 404-224-4474.