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## Jagged Justice

When it comes to juvenile delinquents, society tends to offer one-gender-fits-all services. And it's not usually the girls who benefit. If a few programs available, they are sent to inappropriate jails or back to unstable homes. Now the need for more options is becoming clear.

July 29, 1996 | ELIZABETH MEHRKE | TIMES STAFF WRITER

It was "a wild and crazy thought," adolescent specialist Ruth Herman Wells of Woodburn, Ore., recalled, the notion that "maybe, just possibly, girls might have special needs." With sturdy grass-roots support, Oregon's Royal Access for Girls Task Force was born, and in 1993 Oregon became the first state to enact legislation addressing the serious shortage of services for troubled girls.

That was the year Allen Hunt, then director of a residential treatment center for girls in Portland, warned that while girls in distress may not present the same level of terror to the community as delinquent boys, their troubles portend a perilous toll of their own. "It takes awhile for their problems to unfold," Hunt recounted. "In fact, these girls are like time bombs."

Sponsors of the Oregon bill—which required state agencies to document and correct funding disparities between boys and girls in human services, include juvenile justice—say its very existence was an acknowledgment of a gender-based double standard in juvenile justice. In June, that double standard was reaffirmed when the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention—along with Girls Inc., a nationwide membership organization formerly known as the Girls' Clubs of America—released "Prevention and Parity," a report on delinquent girls.

The study offered clear examples of how delinquent girls receive unequal and unfair treatment because of gender:

\* Girls are more likely to be detained for lesser offenses, and for longer periods of time. On Feb. 25, 1995, when the juvenile justice office conducted a one "Children in Custody" census, 12% of the girls—versus 1% of the boys—were in custody for so-called status offenses like running away.

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