

IMPROVING YOUTH OUTCOMES

Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice
2015 Operating Plan Six-Month Update

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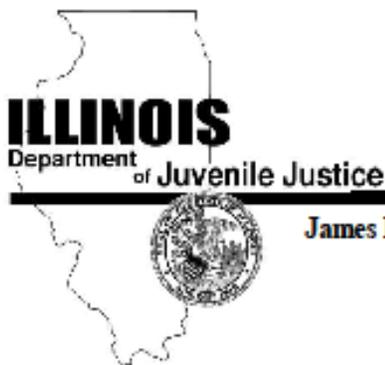
BRUCE RAUNER
Governor

Six Month Update:

Reporting Progress On Outcomes

March 2015 - August 2015





Bruce Rauner
Governor

Candice Jones
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Dear Illinois Leaders,

In March, the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice announced its Plan for Action – a comprehensive one-year operating plan, designed to advance the Department’s interwoven goals: making Illinois communities safer for all residents by fostering better life outcomes for youth in the Department’s custody.

This is not work that IDJJ is undertaking alone, but rather is the result of ongoing collaboration among Department staff, advocates, legislators and expert partners. As we approach the mid-way point in implementing our one-year plan, we want to provide an update on our progress. I am encouraged to report that, while there is more to be done, we have made definitive progress over the last six months due to the efforts of Department staff who have gone above and beyond to implement these aggressive points of action. In the attached report, you will learn about some of the Department’s early successes, as well as challenges that we continue to face.

In our operating plan, we introduced five core priorities:

- Right-Size*** – Reduce the use of secure custody for low-risk youth
- Rehabilitate*** – Improve programs to meet the needs of high-risk youth
- Reintegrate*** – Improve programs to ensure successful reentry
- Respect*** – Create a safe and respectful environment for youth and staff
- Report*** – Increase transparency and accountability

Over the last six months, IDJJ has made progress on these priorities to keep Illinois’ communities safer while providing better services to youth in our care. We have reduced the number of youth in secure care in our Youth Centers, but know we can do more to ensure that placement is reserved for only the highest risk youth. We are providing improved individualized support to youth and are doing a better job connecting them to community-based services to help them succeed when they are released. In addition, staffs have been better trained in topics like safely handling challenging situations and are beginning to use more effective tools to help improve youth outcomes.

We will not rest on our progress. We must continue to bring in staff to meet critical needs, including filling mental health and education positions. We need to continue to provide staff with the tools they need to do their jobs most effectively and promote the best outcomes for youth. We must further strengthen the Aftercare system that supports the reentry of IDJJ youth back to his or her community, providing individualized plans for every youth in the system, and expanding partnerships with organizations that can provide the support they need.

We look forward to continuing to work with our partners and to forging new collaborations with an expanded network of juvenile justice champions. We are confident that, together, we can help produce better outcomes for youth in our care, and better outcomes for all of our communities.

In Service,

Candice Jones
Director

IMPROVING YOUTH OUTCOMES: SIX-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

August, 2015

RIGHT-SIZE

Enabling a greater number of low-risk youth to receive services in the community and out of facilities will better serve those individuals and enable IDJJ to devote resources to those who need them most.

The primary purpose of the Illinois juvenile justice system is to rehabilitate youth and protect the public from juvenile crime, while recognizing that incarceration is often not the best way to accomplish these purposes. One of IDJJ's most important priorities, therefore, is to "right-size" our Youth Centers – to place youth in secure custody only when they pose a significant risk to public safety and when community-based treatment is not a viable option.

- In July and August, Governor Rauner signed into law several bills to improve the state's juvenile justice system and help the Department begin to right-size its Youth Centers. Several highlights of these important bills were: excluding youth convicted of misdemeanors from being sentenced to IDJJ custody; clarifying the length of community supervision and ensuring that the length of time is consistent with research and evidence-based practices; eliminating automatic transfer from juvenile court to adult court of 15-year-olds accused of certain crimes, restoring judges' discretion to consider whether public safety and rehabilitation goals will be best addressed by the juvenile court system or the adult court system; and prohibiting children under the age of 13 from being held in a county detention facility unless there is no viable community-based alternative.¹
- Historically, many youth have been returned to IDJJ custody for minor reporting or administrative violations of their parole terms that did not pose a threat to public safety. The Department is now developing a continuum of sanctions that can be imposed depending on the seriousness of the infraction. The use of graduated sanctions will help to ensure that youth on Aftercare are returned to IDJJ custody when necessary for public safety.
- Finally, the Department has made strides in implementing the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI), an essential new tool that provides an objective assessment of a youth's risk factors. This tool will help the Department determine which youth can be safely treated in the community or if he or she should be placed in a secure Youth Center. Staffs are being trained on the new tool and have begun to use it on a piloted basis. It will be in use throughout each of the Youth Centers by November 2015.

¹The Governor signed the following bills into law in July and August of 2015: Senate Bill 1560, House Bill 2471, House Bill 2567, House Bill 3141 and House Bill 3718.

REHABILITATE

Ensuring that each IDJJ youth has an individualized support plan and receives the necessary services to prepare for successful community reentry.

IDJJ believes each youth should have a personalized plan and access to a range of high-quality mental health and counseling services, along with educational, vocational, and life-skills programming to support their return to the community.

- The Department has selected the YASI as a risk assessment instrument to determine which youth can be treated safely in the community as well as to assess youths' strengths and needs, identify potential mental health and substance use issues, and develop clear plans for rehabilitation in Youth Centers and on Aftercare. The first phase of staff training was completed in April, and a pilot period began in May that will conclude at the end of August. However, due to the phased rollout approach, not every youth in IDJJ custody has an individualized plan based on the YASI. The second phase of training begins in September and all staff will be trained on this new tool by November. Every youth coming, or returning, to IDJJ beginning in November will have a completed assessment.
- Nearly all (98.88 percent) of youth in IDJJ facilities have at least one diagnosed mental disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition). The Department is working to expand its capacity to provide higher-risk, higher-need youth with quality mental health and counseling services. However, the hiring process has been a challenge and progress has continued to be delayed, especially in communities where the Department is not able to recruit from a larger pool of mental health professionals. IDJJ will be utilizing some new recruitment strategies this Fall to help fill these critical positions.
- A key element of IDJJ's work is to provide youth with a high-quality education. One challenge has been having an adequate number of qualified teachers to meet the needs of IDJJ youth. In the last six months, IDJJ has substantially expanded its recruitment activities to fill teacher vacancies to bring the Department closer to the 10:1 student/teacher ratios for general education. Despite this progress, IDJJ has not yet met its hiring goals for education positions. IDJJ schools continue to face unique hiring challenges, such as year-round school operations, which make it more difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers who are used to a traditional school calendar.
- The IDJJ school system is also better coordinating services and revising schedules so that youth with special education needs get the additional support they need while still participating in regular education classes. However, to provide the appropriate level of support, IDJJ will need to hire even more special education teachers in the next six months.

- Youth need job and life skills when they are released; IDJJ has made strengthening vocational education a high priority. In the last six months, vocational education positions have been filled at four of the six IDJJ Youth Centers, where they are developing programs in computer technology, culinary arts and horticulture. IDJJ teachers have also piloted new on-line blended learning tools to create teaching plans tailored to the needs and abilities of each youth. IDJJ is also piloting, at two Centers, a computer tablet program that allows youth to take courses in a broad range of subjects and to progress at their own pace. IDJJ youth have completed almost 2500 courses.
- Developing partnerships with organizations and individuals to offer programming and support for IDJJ youth has been more of a challenge at *Youth Centers* that are in smaller communities, where there are fewer potential partners. IDJJ must do more to expand these opportunities outside the Chicago metropolitan area and to remove some of the barriers that exist to wider community engagement. In the months ahead, IDJJ will work to build additional partnerships to provide increased positive alternatives for more youth in more locations.

REINTEGRATE

Working to make sure that youth released from IDJJ receive the supports they need to successfully reenter the community, and not return to IDJJ custody.

For many youth in the juvenile justice system, the greatest challenges occur upon release when they are returned to the same neighborhoods and societal pressures they faced before detention. IDJJ must help ensure that these youth receive the placements, breadth of services, and supports they need. Aftercare specialists help youth who are required to have post-release supervision take advantage of a range of local services in their communities. Aftercare specialists also provide specific levels of supervision and monitoring according to a youth's risk assessment. The Department is continuing to strengthen the Aftercare system through solidifying placement resources, expanding resource networks, and hiring more specialists.

- To address the challenges presented by large caseloads IDJJ has increased the number of Aftercare caseworkers and removed youth from the Aftercare system who have made enough progress to be discharged. As a result, the Department has been able to provide a higher level of care to youth who need it most. To make Aftercare as effective as it must be, the Department still needs to further reduce caseloads, increase training for staff, and improve tools for measuring and reporting progress of youth in the program.

- In March, IDJJ opened the state's first juvenile Day Reporting Center in Cook County which helps provide support to youth released from secure custody. The Center hosts a range of programs to promote positive behavior, including GED classes, vocational education and job development programs, as well as programs that focus on writing, performance and other activities that build confidence and critical life skills, all created in partnership with community-based organizations. IDJJ will work to develop these Centers throughout the state.
- The Day Reporting Center will also work with youth who struggle to follow the rules that govern their release through a new system of graduated sanctions and rewards. The Day Reporting Center provides a new alternative to keep low-risk youth in the community and help them get back on track if they violate the terms of their release but do not engage in criminal activity. The Public Welfare Foundation has awarded a grant to support IDJJ to provide assistance to help implement these post-release sanctions and supervision levels.

RESPECT

Creating an organizational culture and physical environment that promotes care, respect and positive youth development while ensuring the safety and well-being of all who live and work there.

- IDJJ must be a safe and respectful environment for youth and staff. The Department must have appropriate staffing levels and staff must be well-trained to address the challenges they may face, including training in methods that defuse conflict and promote good behavior without resorting to drastic punishments. Youth also must be held accountable for their behavior using effective tools that respect their Constitutional rights and foster positive development. To illustrate, IDJJ conducted an anonymous survey of staff in every Youth Center in collaboration with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). One issue raised often was that staff want more tools to work with youth in difficult and tense situations. The tools described below will help, but more effort is needed to ensure staff buy-in statewide.
- IDJJ implemented the use of Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) methods to provide staff with additional tools to de-escalate potentially harmful situations with high-needs populations. Approximately 300 staff have been trained on CPI to date. It will be rolled out to all facilities this Winter.
 - IDJJ is expanding the use of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model, which provides youth with incentives for good behavior in place of a hyper focus on negative consequences for undesirable behavior, to all facilities. PBIS has been demonstrated to be effective in helping kids to improve their behavior and make better choices, and to help prepare for return to communities. IDJJ is taking steps to hire a specially-trained PBIS coach who will assist staff at all IDJJ facilities with the new system.

- Governor Rauner appointed the state's first Independent Juvenile Ombudsman, who will advocate for the rights of youth, help them obtain needed services, and investigate and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of youth in Youth Facilities and on Aftercare. The Ombudsman will make annual reports and recommendations for improvements to the Governor and state legislature.
- IDJJ is taking additional steps to recognize staff for the outstanding work they do. The Department recently launched an annual event in which IDJJ's leadership team identify staff who have made extraordinary contributions. This approach, along with other recognition efforts such as the Employee of the Month award, is aimed at building strong staff morale.

REPORT

Enhancing communications and management systems to strengthen operations, improve outcomes, increase public safety and inform the public.

IDJJ is committed to increasing transparency and accountability, to strengthening its capacity to measure program effectiveness and their impact on youth outcomes, and to making expanded data available to the public for review.

- A cornerstone of this commitment is the development of a data management system that will enable IDJJ to track youth progress, assess program effectiveness, and inform decision-making. While there have been some bureaucratic delays in developing the full new system, IDJJ has on boarded new staff, including a Chief Information Officer, who are responsible for collecting and analyzing existing data and tracking that data against key measures. Much of this data is now available to the general public every month at www.illinois.gov/idjj.
- Community forums have been held at all facilities to engage community partners in IDJJ activities, and have resulted in the creation of new programs for youth. A new partnership between the Pere Marquette facility and YouthBuild is giving young men the opportunity to qualify for trade certifications that may help them get jobs after release, and earn money as they learn these skills. In Harrisburg, IDJJ has partnered with Southern Illinois University's Touch of Nature Environmental Center to give youth experiential learning opportunities in horticulture and agricultural programming.
- The Department will be developing its second annual report this fall. The report, which will be available to the public through IDJJ's website, will build upon the first report highlighting the agency's progress, challenges and trends.

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