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Statement from Candice Jones, Director, Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice on the Proposed Closing of IYC-Kewanee

SPRINGFIELD –Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) Director Candice Jones today issued the following statement:

“The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice today announced it will be closing its Youth Center in Kewanee. The decision to close IYC-Kewanee was difficult, but it is the right decision for the State of Illinois. We considered many factors in arriving at this conclusion, including: national best practices; optimal youth outcomes; ongoing challenges at the facility as highlighted by court-appointed juvenile justice experts and costs to the State. An analysis of each area supported an overall decision to close.

“This decision is about transitioning Illinois to a new model of rehabilitating youth that aligns with national best practices and improves community safety.

“What we know from national research and other states is that youth do best when we work with them in the most appropriate, least-restrictive setting. For misdemeanants and youth with other low-level offenses, that means partnering with proven, effective non-profits to provide resources and work with youth in their communities. It also means that secure custody in state facilities should be reserved for only the highest risk youth who pose a threat to the community.

“The Department’s facilities have historically mirrored adult correctional institutions in policy, programming and procedures, failing to take into account the unique needs of adolescent brain development. By closing this large, maximum-security facility, we will be able to transition to developing smaller, treatment-focused facilities that are proven to be more effective in rehabilitating youth.

“As of February 10, the Department had 436 youth in its care. Our capacity to room youth in single bunks without using confinement, a manner considered to be a best practice, is 989 bunks. Closure of IYC-Kewanee would leave 683 beds. That is enough capacity to comply with best practices, and account for seasonal fluctuations in the number of youth confined. We cannot continue to operate six facilities when the numbers are so clear.

“This closure will also allow IDJJ to reinvest a portion of the cost-savings into community-based programming and reduce overall costs to the State. It will also allow the State to explore repurposing the facility to continue to provide services [to citizens, other populations, etc.]. That’s good for taxpayers, youth, families, our communities and the entire State.”

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