

Ohio Conservative Juvenile Justice Network Testimony
HB 49: Biennial Budget Bill for FY18-19
House Finance Transportation Subcommittee
Tuesday, March 21, 2017

Chair McColley, Vice Chair Reece, and members of the House Finance Transportation Committee, I submit this testimony on HB 49 on behalf of the Ohio Conservative Juvenile Justice Network (OCJJN). OCJJN is a coalition of conservative voices weighing in on much needed juvenile justice reforms in Ohio based on our beliefs in strengthening children and families, public safety, cost-effective government, workforce development, national defense, and faith. OCJJN's founding members include Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton (ret.), Betty Montgomery, former Ohio attorney general and auditor of state; Col. Tom Moe (ret.), former director of Ohio Veteran Services; and Dr. Reginald Wilkinson, former director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction, Tyler Duvelius, Ohio Director, Christian Coalition and Holly Gross, Vice President, Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

Ohio has long been a leader in juvenile justice reform efforts, mostly led by the Department of Youth Services (DYS). These reforms have led to improved functioning of Ohio's juvenile justice system, including significantly reducing the number of youth in juvenile correctional facilities, redirecting funding to local courts, and increasing public safety by improving outcomes for court-involved youth. We believe HB 49 continues to support these efforts by:

- Providing continued support for DYS's community-based programs:
 - HB 49 includes level funding for DYS's community-based program options for youth including the state's nationally renowned RECLAIM program and subsequent programs, particularly the evidence-and-outcome-based Targeted RECLAIM, Competitive RECLAIM, and Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) programs.
 - The success of these programs has led to the overall reduction of DYS correctional population from over 3,000 youth in 1992 to less than 500 youths today. For example, the BHJJ programs have succeeded in addressing the needs of youth facing mental health challenges in the juvenile courts, including improving educational outcomes and decreasing reoffending and trauma symptoms, at a fraction of the cost of correctional facilities.
 - Maintaining funding for these programs is critical to ensure that youth can be kept safely in programs in their home communities that are more effective and less costly than juvenile correctional facilities. We are hopeful that these programs can garner additional support in this and future budgets – either in new funding or recaptured funding from facility population decreases or closures – as they create a clear positive investment in all Ohioans. Spending money at this level ends up in far greater savings to prevent them from becoming adult criminals.
- Not merging the Department of Youth Services (DYS) with the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC): Over the past year, OCJJN members have been involved in discussions about a potential merger between DYS and DRC – Ohio's adult correctional facility. OCJJN was concerned about this potential merger, particularly given the large developmental differences between youth and adults.

- Youth are at a critical developmental stage in their lives and must be approached with accountability coupled with rehabilitation to help get them back on the right path. DYS also has a significantly smaller footprint than DRC, leaving the possibility that DYS's uniquely successful programs and reforms may get swallowed by a much larger system that carries a much different approach.

In addition, much of federal legislation does not allow youth to interact with adults, therefore requiring totally separate programs anyway.

- The mission of the juvenile justice system is very different from the adult mission. The goal is to rehabilitate the youth where possible. Therefore, there is no "sentences" but rather "disposition"; "confinement" is not in a "prison" but rather in a "detention facility."

In your committee's consideration of HB 49, the OCJJN supports the potential to increase data collection for Ohio's juvenile courts. Unfortunately, Ohio is the only large state in the country that does not have a uniform, comprehensive overview of youth in our juvenile courts. The OCJJN recently released a policy statement on data collection, noting that data collection would help Ohio stakeholders:

- Provide for better policy decisions based on data and evidence to improve outcomes for youth in juvenile courts, which in turn would increase public safety by reducing reoffending and make it more likely that youth will be employed.
- Build on current systems of data already collected by DYS and the Ohio Supreme Court, partnering with those entities to identify what new data needs to be collected and why. Once identified by collaboration with DYS and the juvenile judges, taxpayer dollars can then be used efficiently in directing resources towards those areas.
- Establish a collaboration between DYS and the Ohio Supreme Court under their respective roles so that data collection is coordinated and not duplicated.
- Be more competitive for government and private foundation grants.
- Maintain Ohio's national leadership status on juvenile justice issues.
- Improve collaboration with other stakeholders, such as mental health and substance abuse agencies; schools; and community-based programs, to match youth with services designed to get them on the right track.
- Enable entities to have the capacity to collect data.
- Provide safeguards to be sure that this does not become an unfunded mandate on the courts, and that courts work with county commissioners on funding. If we make this a requirement, we must be sure that there is a funding stream to do so.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions the Subcommittee may have.