

Ohio Department of Youth Services

Testimony on HB 166

House Finance Subcommittee Committee on Transportation

April 11, 2019

Chairman Greenspan, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, my name is Ryan Gies and I am the Director of the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify once again in support of House Bill 166.

Each of you likely saw my testimony before the full Finance Committee on March 21. With that in mind, I will not read that full testimony again, but instead will give you a picture of some of the specific provisions in our budget, why we are making these requests, and the outcomes we envision.

***Vocational Education***

The average age of a youth entering our facilities is roughly 17 ½. Many of these youth already have finished their secondary education or will soon earn their degree or GED after arriving. As the age demographic of our youth has changed, we need to change our educational opportunities to prepare them to join a modern workforce.

We are requesting \$141,000 to bring community college instruction directly into our facilities. Youth tuition will be covered by federal Pell Grants and the programming will include coordination from the community college to schedule the courses, enroll the students, assist in preparation of financial aid documents, and link students with schools near their homes so they can continue education following reentry into the community. The classroom-setting instruction will be delivered to at least 15 students at a time at each of our three facilities, for a total of 45 or more youth served at any given time. We are seeking Associate's Degree programming with 10 industry-recognized credentials that can be earned through the course of the program. This model will allow for a seamless transition for youth both among our facilities and when returning home.

This will prepare our youth for in-demand careers, which will help them build the foundation of a crime-free future while also helping local employers meet workforce needs. Success with this initiative should be easily measurable by tracking certificates earned and job placement numbers.

### ***Community Corrections Facilities (CCFs)***

There are 12 Community Corrections Facilities across Ohio, which are a key component in our juvenile justice system. They are available to judges as an alternative placement for felony youth who would otherwise be committed to DYS. They can also be used as a step-down for youth at DYS facilities who are preparing to return home.

Just like our three main DYS facilities, CCFs can be a challenging, yet rewarding, work environment. We are seeking an additional \$1,110,196 in CCF funding for FY '20 and \$1,749,053 in FY '21 to ensure that they not only remain viable as an essential part of our system, but also that they are equipped to be successful with youth no matter how they come to them—whether on a suspended commitment to DYS, stepped-down upon release from DYS, or while still in the custody of DYS in preparation for reentry. Like state facilities, these locally-operated, state-funded CCFs face the challenges of increased cost of operation, including funding staff salaries. This funding increase is necessary to tie annual salary increases to those received by state counterparts. This will allow CCFs to compete with other area employers for talent, and will help them to attract and retain the staff needed to work with this challenging youth population.

In terms of outcomes, we will see that the CCFs are able to continue providing high-quality, cognitive-based treatment programming to youth that are not best-suited for a DYS facility. We currently track the average daily populations of these facilities and the average length of stay of youth. We will continue to use this data to evaluate CCFs and these measures help us ensure that the CCFs are being utilized as an effective diversion from DYS and a meaningful transition for youth in DYS custody.

### ***Mental Health Treatment***

We typically have 20-30 girls in DYS custody at any given time. All of them are on our mental health caseload. Our girls are housed at several gender-specific alternative placements across the state, including one CCF that has dedicated beds for DYS intake and treatment, as well as two residential programs that are licensed by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. While the CCF portion of our proposed budget addresses the planned staffing needs related to the girls within the primary facility, the number and high mental health demands of this population have frequently taxed capacity. This has highlighted the need for additional treatment beds. This budget seeks \$450,000 in added funding each in FY '20 and FY '21. Success will be measured by the rates at which girls are referred, admitted, and successfully treated through residential mental health programming.

### ***Community Programs***

The Governor's budget also calls for an additional \$1.1 million for Competitive RECLAIM. Competitive RECLAIM is a performance-driven grant program available to juvenile courts to implement research-backed programming at multiple points in the juvenile justice system. All grant funding is for alternatives to residential care. This funding initiative has been successful in reforming how youth are treated when they

become involved with the court system in many communities. Examples include intensive home-based treatment, individualized wraparound services, truancy reduction, and diversion.

With this expansion of Competitive RECLAIM, jurisdictions will target one or more of three areas to improve the abilities of youth and families to survive and thrive. The first of these is the development or expansion of community-based assessment centers. The intent is to develop a community collaborative that addresses the holistic needs of youth and families and decreases reliance on secure detention. Through a center, youth headed for court or detention can be screened, assessed for risk and need, and either referred for service or receive direct delivery of service.

The second area is probation transformation. Six counties will undergo an assessment and redesign of county probation practices, as well as develop probation metrics that can then be utilized across Ohio to both improve local practice and provide for consistent data collection on probation youth statewide.

The final area is an expansion of the successful Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) model, but with a specific focus on girls involved in both the juvenile justice and behavioral health systems. As referenced earlier, the prevalence of mental health issues in juvenile justice-involved girls is high. This programming will address these needs with in-home interventions, and may also include girls leaving both DYS and CCFs.

In addition to the expansion of Competitive RECLAIM, the budget calls for an additional \$417,567 for the Youth Services Grant. This is a restoration of historic funding previously cut by HB 49 of the 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. This funding is distributed to Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts to provide judges with an array of options for meeting the needs of youth.

As we do currently with community programs, we will continue to track youth as they progress through services and rely on third-party quality assurance to make sure that programs are implemented as intended. Specific to the girls programming, funded interventions will fall under the BHJJ evaluation that is conducted by Case Western Reserve University. This evaluation not only measures reoffending, but also child well-being indicators such as education, trauma and substance use.

### ***Conclusion***

This budget supports Governor DeWine's goal of providing opportunities for every Ohio kid and will help DYS work toward that goal. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 166. I will now be happy to respond to questions from the committee.