



Department of
Youth Services

**Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS)
Testimony of Director Harvey J. Reed
Subcommittee on Transportation
April 30, 2015**

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chairwoman Brown and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Corrections, my name is Harvey Reed. I am the Director of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS). I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Governor Kasich's "Blueprint for a New Ohio" Budget for fiscal years 2016-2017. Governor Kasich's proposed budget continues to build on the framework established in his last budget. This budget wholeheartedly supports DHS in its mission to improve Ohio's future by habilitating youth and empowering families and communities. This budget allows the Department to continue the increased funding for highly successful researched-based community programming, and fully fund our three statewide facilities, at 93% of the funding we received in the last biennium.

As I am sure you are aware, DHS is the state component of Ohio's juvenile justice system. It is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. The majority of our population is between the ages of 16 and 17; over half of our male population has a mental health diagnosis, and that number rises to about 90% for our female population. Furthermore, almost 50% of our students are receiving special education services. These attributes, combined with an average length of stay in our facility of 11 months, provide our staff with significant challenges.

DYS is committed to providing young people with education, behavioral health care, and other services they need to successfully reintegrate into the community. Our facilities are accredited by the American Correctional Association and provide a variety of services and treatment for youth, including a fully-accredited high school, behavioral-health services, medical and dental care, recreation, religious services, community service opportunities, victim awareness, and reentry services.

However, DHS is so much more than just juvenile correctional facilities. The Department is on the forefront of juvenile justice across the nation, and research shows that our methods are supported by the public. According to a survey administered by The Pew Charitable Trusts of 1,200 bipartisan voters nationwide, the public supports sending serious juvenile offenders to corrections facilities, and they favor a range of less-costly

alternatives for lower-level offenders. The survey found that, overwhelmingly, people believe that juveniles are fundamentally different from adults and want policymakers to invest in programs that help prevent youth from reoffending. When it comes to the juvenile justice system, voters want offending youth to get the services and supervision they need to change their behavior and stop committing crimes—even if that means less incarceration.

This budget proposal before you is in line with these concepts. Last year, we were able to close one of our facilities due to a strategically reduced population of youth in our facilities. To put this in perspective, the Department operated 8 facilities serving 1,500 youth in the year 2008 with 1,400 youth on parole. Currently, we have an average population of fewer than 500 youth in facilities and an additional 400 youth on parole. This significant decrease in facility population has allowed the Department to reinvest dollars previously spent on facility operations into highly successful community programs. DYS spends nearly \$60 million less per year on facilities than it did in 2008. Additionally, funding to support communities increased by 23% from 2009 to 2014. Through a true partnership between the Department and county juvenile courts, we have been able to change the landscape of juvenile justice in Ohio, serving more youth in the community and raising the bar with research-supported practices.

DYS has invested in an array of complementary community initiatives to reach youth, support families, and build communities. Whenever possible, youth who are at lower risk to reoffend are served with appropriate treatment closer to their family and their local communities. Evaluation results have shown that youth have a drastic decrease of reoffending if they are allowed to remain close to home and their family support system. To provide youth with this opportunity the Department funds community programs through Youth Services Grants to all 88 counties, Behavioral Health/Juvenile Justice (BHJJ), and 12 state-funded Community Corrections Facilities (CCFs) that treat felony youth in lieu of a DYS commitment. The majority of our community investment lies within our highly successful RECLAIM program and its expanded initiatives.

RECLAIM Ohio is a funding initiative which encourages juvenile courts to provide a range of community-based options to meet the needs of each juvenile offender or youth at risk of offending. By diverting youth from DYS facilities, courts have the opportunity to increase the funds available locally through RECLAIM. Building on the success of the RECLAIM Ohio program, the Department has supported the Targeted RECLAIM initiative that funds evidence-based interventions focused on risk and need principles. The program is provided to courts that have historically committed the most youth to the department and that commit to reducing and maintaining those reductions in DYS admissions. The program was rolled out in FY 10 to six urban counties. From FY 2012 to 2013, the initiative was expanded to nine additional counties. The six original counties have reduced admissions to DYS facilities by a total of 691 youth over the last five years. The nine expansion counties have reduced admissions by 104 youth over the past three

years.

The newest phase of RECLAIM, Competitive RECLAIM, was developed in collaboration with county juvenile courts and university researchers. It will provide \$2.2 million annually to fund 29 unique programs, impacting 24 counties. This new effort will provide financial support to juvenile courts and local communities so they can develop research-backed services to meet the needs of youth and families. Each program includes an evaluation component to ensure that it is implemented with fidelity and produces the intended results.

The University of Cincinnati recently released a study that evaluated the RECLAIM program. It examined just over 10,000 youth who had come in contact with the juvenile justice system at every commitment level. The study concluded that RECLAIM programming is an extremely cost effective commitment option, with part of that low cost associated with the low rate of recidivism of RECLAIM programs. Ultimately, the study found that for every dollar spent on RECLAIM, the state saved between 13 and 57 dollars compared to incarceration.

DYS has realized a significant decrease in our population due to our increased focus on community based treatment. However, some youth are not suited for community treatment and are best served in a DYS facility. We do not view these youth as the “worst of the worst,” but rather these youth are the most in need of treatment. To help address the needs of these youth, we have increased the amount of programming and meaningful activities provided to a youth on a daily basis.

DYS operates its own school district, the Buckeye United School District, and each of our schools meets the Ohio Department of Education standards. Last year DYS teachers provided the opportunity for 26 youth to earn high school diplomas and 86 youth to earn GEDs. Moreover, DYS provides opportunities for DYS graduates to participate in college classes offered through a partnership with Ashland University. In addition to the traditional school curriculum, the department offers career technical programs that help students obtain entry-level job certificates in fields such as food service, building trades, horticulture, green energy and computer repair. We were able to purchase a simulator that allows youth to become certified to operate a vast array of heavy machinery. In total, 346 career certificates were awarded last year. We now offer a total of five formal apprenticeship opportunities for youth to prepare for employment as cooks, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, janitors, and recovery (recycling) operators. Furthermore, staff has been challenged to think of new and innovative programs for our graduate youth. One such example is one of our facilities partnering with a local restaurant chain in Cleveland called Burger Fi. Youth have the opportunity to begin a job that can continue upon release, save money for independent living, and gain valuable work experience. Staff escort the youth to and from the restaurant and monitor them during their shift.

Learning from the success of our community programs, we are embracing some of these principles in our facilities. As previously mentioned, keeping a youth close to home dramatically increase the success of rehabilitation. To meet this end, we offer a variety of opportunities for families to visit their loved ones at our facilities. We offer free bus trips, as well as video communicator services similar to Skype, to connect families to youth in facilities. I am also proud to say that our Cuyahoga Hills and Indian River facilities now offer visitation opportunities to families 7 days a week to accommodate every family's unique work schedule. Furthermore, our juvenile parole officers engage both the youth and their family from day one to develop a positive connection and increase the youth's chance of successful reintegration into the community.

Low risk youth are served primarily in the community in a variety of departmentally funded programs, while youth with more intensive needs are receiving more services than they ever have received before in the facilities. This "right sizing" of our agency has allowed us to carry out our mission and vision in new and innovative ways that are working. This budget allows us to not only to provide the right programming for the right youth, but we are able to do so in a more efficient manner. As previously mentioned, we are only requesting 93% of our budget from the previous biennium.

The proposed funding allows DYS to focus on our shared priorities of rehabilitating youth, empowering families and communities and promoting public safety. Under this budget, DYS will continue moving forward with system-wide reforms that have transformed DYS into a model for other states. DYS will make efficient use of every taxpayer dollar and explore opportunities for cost savings, while maintaining its ability to fulfill its mission. The Governor's Proposed Executive Budget supports helping these young people change their lives as we set out to build a safer Ohio.

I would like to thank the many groups who have been supportive of our initiatives and have challenged us to do a better job serving youth. We appreciate the open and honest dialogue with these partners. I would also like to thank our employee unions who work with us on a daily basis – OCSEA/AFSCME, SEIU/1199 and OEA.

Chairman Uecker and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Corrections, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Governor's Ohio Budget. My staff and I are available to answer any questions you may have at this time.