

Erin Davies, Executive Director, Juvenile Justice Coalition
Testimony before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee's Corrections Subcommittee
Department of Youth Services Budget
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Chair Uecker, Vice Chair Brown, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee's Corrections Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on the Department of Youth Services (DYS) budget.

My name is Erin Davies and I am the Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC). JJC advocates statewide to better align Ohio's juvenile justice system with best practices and research and I have worked both at the national level and here in Ohio on juvenile justice reform efforts for over 6 years.

JJC has an excellent working relationship with DYS, partnering with the agency on initiatives, sharing information, and conducting citizen visits of DYS facilities. In the past several years, DYS has taken significant steps to improve the agency internally and Ohio's juvenile justice system, including increasing investments in research- and evidence-based programs throughout the state through various initiatives. These efforts have in turn led to significant cost-savings by the state through reducing the DYS juvenile correctional population and the closure of the Scioto Correctional Facility, which has yet to be sold and the proceeds of which will also be returned to the General Revenue Fund (GRF). JJC is incredibly supportive of DYS's efforts.

However, JJC is extremely concerned about the \$32 million reduction of GRF funding proposed in the DYS budget. We strongly believe that this money should be reinvested in Ohio's youth who are at-risk of or involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth in the juvenile justice system are often youth with the highest level of needs in communities, whether they struggle in school, face mental health or substance abuse challenges, or live in neighborhoods that expose them to trauma on a regular basis. In addition, Black and Latino youth are disproportionately affected by juvenile justice system policies.

The most frustrating thing about the juvenile justice system is that we know what works. However, there is a gap between what works and how we deal with youth, often leaving room for youth to fall through. Inappropriate responses to youth are expensive, create collateral consequences, and are likely to increase the youth's recidivism. For example, while detaining some youth is necessary for public safety, research shows us that placing youth in detention has been shown to be one of best predictors of recidivism. Youth who spend any amount of time in detention have a host of short- and long-term negative outcomes, including that they are more likely to abuse substances and less likely to complete high school, find employment, and form stable families. And all of this comes at a price tag of double the price of effective, safe community-based alternatives, such as electronic monitoring and day reporting centers. Finally, Ohio has very little data available on youth in the state's 38 detention centers, making it difficult to determine how detention affects Ohio youth and how detention decisions are being made.

Fortunately, we also know what works to improve outcomes for both youth and communities. Continuing with the detention example, several counties in Ohio have implemented the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, which has safely reduced Ohio's detention population. Ohio's various reinvestment programs, including Targeted RECLAIM, the Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice initiative (BHJJ), and Competitive RECLAIM, have also helped to build programs that we know work. However, many of the initiatives focused on evidence-based programming have only reached a handful of counties; Competitive RECLAIM has the furthest reach of all DYS's programs to 24 counties – and several Competitive RECLAIM counties already participate in other DYS initiatives.

Over the years, I have spoken to many youth, family members, and other juvenile justice stakeholders at the local level, all of whom have said they needed more appropriate, tailored community-based interventions earlier in the court involvement cycle – not less. The juvenile justice system still faces many deficiencies for youth, including

many youth in Ohio not being represented by attorneys, a lack of data collection in the state, and the need for additional community supports to help put and keep youth on the right path. I would strongly urge the Committee to retain or reinvest the cuts in DYS's budget to increase support to Ohio's youth and communities. I would also like to present the attached sign on letter in support of this request, which has been signed onto over 25 individuals and organizations involved in youth issues throughout the state. Thank you and I welcome any questions you have at this time.