

Testimony of the Juvenile Justice Coalition
Senate Finance Committee
Sub. HB 166: FY20-21 Operating Budget
May 2019

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony on Sub. HB 166, Ohio's main operating budget for the FY 20-21 biennium, as it relates to general government. My name is Cayla Burton and I am the Policy Director of the Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC).

JJC is a state-wide advocacy organization that focuses on youth in Ohio's juvenile courts and works to align current practice with research-based, best practices that improve outcomes for youth involved or at-risk of involvement in the juvenile court system, their families, their communities, and all Ohioans.

Funding for DYS Community-Based Programs

HB 166 increases funding for Competitive RELAIM by \$1.1 million in each fiscal year and maintains level funding for all other community-based programs, which includes RECLAIM, the Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice programs (BHJJ), and Targeted RECLAIM. This array of programs has been critical to redirecting youth out of Ohio's youth prisons and into effective, cost-efficient community-based programs that produce better outcomes for youth. Since 1992, Ohio's youth prison population has been cut from nearly 2,600 youth to today's average of 550 youth.

The cost-savings associated with these changes are significant. Incarcerating one youth in a DYS youth prison cost nearly \$195,000 per year – the equivalent of 8 years of undergraduate education at The Ohio State University. In contrast, serving one youth in the BHJJ programs costs just over \$5,000 with better outcomes, including reduced reoffending. Over the past several decades, the implementation of the programs listed above resulted in the closure of several DYS facilities, saving the state tens of millions of dollars.

While we appreciate that these community-based programs were maintained at level funding from the last budget bill, apart from the slight increase to Competitive RECLAIM, JJC believes that DYS's community-based programs are a smart, effective investment in taxpayer dollars and should be expanded to serve youth in additional counties or redirected to research-based programming with the goal of further reducing Ohio's youth prison population and closing the state-ran youth prisons.

Nationally, states are moving away from youth prisons and towards expanding, creating, and investing in community-based alternatives. Research has shown that the vast majority of youth – including youth who are at high-risk to reoffend – can be safely served in their communities with significantly less cost and better outcomes if matched with the right programming. To effectively invest in Ohio children who become involved in the juvenile court, the state should begin to reinvest all savings achieved through youth prison population reductions and closures back into community-based alternatives to incarceration and prevention programs to support youth succeeding and staying out of, or not penetrating deeper into, the court system.

In closing, I encourage members of this committee to maintain, if not expand, funding appropriations for DYS' community-based initiatives with the intention of reducing the state's youth prison population. Our state must be committed to protecting and caring for all children and youth, not just a few, because they truly are our future. We can't claim to have the best interest of children in our hearts while many youth suffer behind bars.