

Ohio Department of Youth Services
Testimony on Operating Budget
House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation
February 24, 2021

Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation, my name is Julie Walburn and I am the Assistant Director of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS). I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Governor DeWine's budget for fiscal years 2022-2023.

As Director Gies stated in his testimony before the full Finance Committee on February 11, this budget will equip our staff with the resources needed to successfully treat and habilitate the young people committed to our three state juvenile correctional facilities.

- The Buckeye United School District operates three fully-accredited high schools within our juvenile correctional facilities. Our educators strive to meet the learning needs of youth who are often behind in school when they come to DHS. It is critical that our youth have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or GED.
- DHS has also made vocational training a priority. Our youth population is on average older than in the past and we believe youth will be much more likely to succeed if they are job ready upon reentry. DHS has created partnerships with community colleges in Ohio for youth to earn associate's degrees and industry-recognized credentials for in-demand career fields such as welding and HVAC.
- Sixty-five percent of our male population and one-hundred percent of our female youth have mental health needs that require targeted treatment. DHS mental health and behavioral health staff work diligently to help youth achieve better outcomes with those needs.
- Additional programming such as victim awareness, family engagement, religious services, recreation, and reentry planning are also key to our operation.
- This budget will fund our COVID-19 response including personal protective equipment and increased staffing needs.

As Director Gies also explained, Ohio has achieved a nationally-recognized balance between community programming and facility operations through decades of investment and development into community alternatives. Over the years, we have learned a great deal about addressing delinquent behavior locally.

- Youth often see better outcomes in reoffending when they are treated closer to their homes and their family support system. We want to make sure that Ohio's

county juvenile courts have options to treat those low-risk youth who are suited for community alternatives to incarceration.

- This budget continues to support RECLAIM Ohio and the other funding initiatives and system reforms that have reduced both felony offending in Ohio and the population at the Department.
- Since the late 1990s, the number of youth adjudicated for felony offenses by county juvenile courts has dropped from more than 13,000 to approximately 3,100 in FY 2020; that's a decrease of more than 75%. The decrease in DYS population from more than 2,000 in the late 1990s to less than 370 today has afforded us the opportunity to work with the high-risk youth who really need to be with us.

At DYS, our vision is a safer Ohio: one youth, one family, and one community at a time. This budget will enable DYS to continue develop and invest in innovative strategies for addressing juvenile crime and protecting public safety in Ohio.

Chairman Patton and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Governor's proposed budget. I am available to answer questions you may have at this time.