



**House Bill 96 Testimony to the Ohio House of representatives  
Public Safety Committee  
Gabriella Celeste, Policy Director, Schubert Center for Child Studies, CWRU  
March 4, 2025 – Submitted Electronically**

Thank you Chair Abrams, Vice-Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas and House Public Safety Committee members.

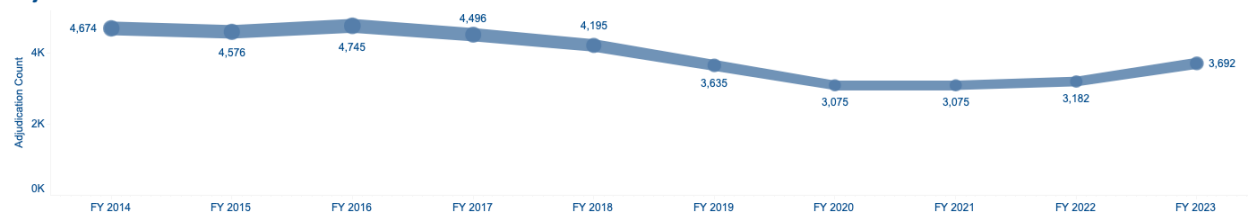
My name is Gabriella Celeste and I offer this testimony as the Policy Director of the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University and an Interested Party on HB 96 concerning budget and policy matters related to justice-involved youth and child and adolescent development overall. I was also proud to serve as a Governor appointee to the Governor's Juvenile Justice Working Group (JJWG) in 2023-2024 and appreciate the thoughtful efforts by members of this body, including Chair Abrams, to explore improvements and innovation at the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS).

The proposed continuing investments in ODYS programming in the introduced version of the FY26-27 budget (HB 96) are vital, particularly the community-based programming investments that safely prevent youth from engaging in delinquent behaviors and going deeper into our systems. I'd like to address 3 related issues in my testimony: (1) What the data says about youth crime and victimization, (2) Key outcomes of Ohio's RECLAIM-funded programs, and (3) How transforming the ODYS correctional system advances safety for all.

**1. Youth are not the drivers of crime in our country – adults are responsible for over 90% of the crime – and children and youth are at highest risk of harm.**

- According to the latest national numbers, delinquency cases dropped 73% from 2005 to 2021.<sup>1</sup> After decades of declining youth arrests, youth crime saw an increase in some areas last year, but the overall rates of adjudication are still lower than a few years ago. See [this chart](#) of ODYS juvenile adjudication trends over the past 10 years from DataOhio:

**Adjudication Trends**



<sup>1</sup> OJJDP, Juvenile Court Statistics Fact Sheet (October 2024) at: <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/publications/delinquency-cases-in-juvenile-court-2021.pdf>

- While kids are not the main drivers of violent crime, they are the main victims. The #1 cause of death of children and teens is now fatal injuries from guns, surpassing traffic accidents for the first time.<sup>2</sup> While youth who carry often report having a gun to be safe for protection, they are actually less safe.

## 2. ODYS has been recognized nationally for its prudent and effective use of state dollars to support local interventions and programming that lead to better youth outcomes and reduce the need for costly and less effective state incarceration.

- Research makes clear that keeping kids out of the justice system as much as possible is in fact a broader safety strategy. Consider the Crossroads Study that compared outcomes 5 years after arrest for 2 groups of teens who had committed the same offense – one group was formally processed through the court system for their arrest and the other group was diverted. It found that the youth who went through the court system were **LESS LIKELY** to have positive outcomes like graduating from school and **MORE** likely to engage in future violence and to be rearrested and incarcerated.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a recent Bowling Green study of ODYS's Reclaim programming found no negative effect on public safety.<sup>4</sup>
- ODYS supports hundreds of local prevention and intervention programs through its Competitive Reclaim (CR) and Targeted Reclaim (TR) programs, as well as its Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) grants, successfully serving thousands of youth while still holding them accountable as-appropriate for their behaviors. Consider a University of Cincinnati study of TR that showed youth who participated in TR were more than **5 TIMES LESS LIKELY** to recidivate in 18 months (4.6%) compared to similar youth who were incarcerated at ODYS instead (28.4%).<sup>5</sup> The CR program has ongoing evaluations to measure long-term outcomes of its programming like admissions to DYS, CCFs and secure detention, residential treatment, and rates of recidivism. And the BHJJ evaluations have shown **significant cost-benefit savings** of keeping youth out of ODYS with positive youth outcomes including reduction in future offending and gains in education, reduced suspensions, reduced substance use, improved functionality, reduced out-of-home placements and other benefits.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Panchal, N. "The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Adolescents." (Feb. 2024) at: <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/>

<sup>3</sup> Cauffman, E. et al. "Crossroads in juvenile justice: the impact of initial processing decision on youth 5 years after arrest." *Development and Psychology* (2020) at : <https://faculty.lsu.edu/pfricklab/pdfs/juvenilejustice-pdfs/dpcauffmanetalmaincrossroadswb.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Burek, M. et al. RECLAIM Ohio Public Safety Study Final Report. Bowling Green State University (2022) at: [https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/dys.ohio.gov/About%20DYS/BGSU\\_RECLAIM\\_PSB\\_FinalReport%202022.pdf](https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/dys.ohio.gov/About%20DYS/BGSU_RECLAIM_PSB_FinalReport%202022.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Latessa, E. et al. Targeted Reclaim Final Report, University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (2018) at: [https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/dys.ohio.gov/About%20DYS/Communications/Reports/Targeted%20RECLAIM/Targeted\\_RECLAIM\\_FinalReport\\_20180323.pdf](https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/dys.ohio.gov/About%20DYS/Communications/Reports/Targeted%20RECLAIM/Targeted_RECLAIM_FinalReport_20180323.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Butcher, F. et al. Statewide BHJJ Evaluation Executive Summary (2020) at: <https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/dys.ohio.gov/About%20DYS/Communications/Reports/BHJJ%20Evaluations/Statewide%20BHJJ%20Evaluation%20Executive%20Summary%202019.pdf>

**3. Transforming Ohio's correctional system by replacing the large JCFs with smaller regional facilities, and eventually adding community correctional facilities (CCFs) in our highest committing counties, will keep confined youth and staff safer.**

- The Governors JJWG was formed due to concerns about violence and the workforce crisis in juvenile correctional facilities (JCFs) that undermined safety. We reviewed ODYS data that showed how the safety of youth and staff was inter-related: the lack of youth specialists results in kids being held in seclusion for extended periods, which contributes to their poor emotional and mental health, which is exacerbated with lack of effective mental health interventions, which leaves youth especially stressed and dysregulated, with limited self-coping skills and increased agitation, which leads to more fighting and leaves everyone feeling less safe. This just becomes a tragic self-fulfilling cycle – we saw the need for a significant change in business as usual and an opportunity for truly meaningful reform.
- Research on smaller correctional facilities shows several factors improve security:
  - o Staff can more easily see prisoner interactions in places because less its crowded.
  - o Its less possible for large groups to gather and challenge staff authority.
  - o Staff and prisoners can more easily get to know each other and develop respectful relationships.
  - o Prisoners report feeling less stress, safer, and more respected by staff.
  - o Prisoners know each other better and so internal divisions are not as strong.
- The most effective security measure in a youth custodial setting is a concept called “relational security”. It’s not just the size of the facility by itself but the culture shift that occurs due to smaller facilities that increases safety by allowing for better staff-youth interactions. Knowing each youth individually informs staff’s ability to more effectively monitor youth behaviors, manage conflicts and de-escalate incidents.
- A final point on the benefit of smaller regional facilities. They are better situated to connect with local resources and communities to create programmatic advantages that are generally missing from large congregate-care facilities. This includes augmenting behavioral health services with local providers but also vocational, mentoring and other programs with community, volunteer and faith-based partners. Proximity to home communities also can facilitate ongoing, intensive family involvement and interventions, and support phased re-entry to better reduce recidivism and future victimization.

This ODYS budget strengthens the return on the investment of our public dollars by enhancing public safety and accountability, increasing safety inside corrections for workers and youth and improving youth outcomes to better ensure their future success.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please contact me at [mgc36@case.edu](mailto:mgc36@case.edu) or 216-368-5314 with any questions.