

Juvenile Justice Fact Sheet Series: Juvenile Correctional Facilities

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Prevention

Diversion

Community-
Based
Alternatives

Community
Corrections
Facilities

Detention

Juvenile
Correctional
Facilities

Parole/
Probation

Reentry

Adult System

What are Juvenile Correctional Facilities?

The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) operates three juvenile correctional facilities in Ohio. These facilities house youth ages 12 to 21 who have been adjudicated delinquent – or found guilty – of an offense in a juvenile court and are committed by a juvenile court judge to a correctional facility. Youth ages 10 and 11 can also be committed to a juvenile correctional facility, but must be placed in a separate facility.

Research on Juvenile Correctional Facilities:

Research illustrates that the use of juvenile correctional facilities to rehabilitate youth does just the opposite. National reports show that violence and abuse are rampant among juvenile correctional facilities throughout the country, with a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation finding that only eleven states had facilities in which dangerous and abusive conditions had not been proven conclusively in recent years. Evidence also shows that placing low- and moderate-risk youth in correctional facilities increases the likelihood of reoffending.

The cost to hold youth in correctional facilities is high. As the Casey Foundation report summarizes, “[m]ost states are spending vast sums of taxpayer money and devoting the bulk of their juvenile justice budgets to correctional institutes and other facility placements when non-residential programming options deliver equal or better results for a fraction of the cost.” Therefore, states have begun focusing on community based alternatives to incarceration, which have much higher success rates rehabilitating delinquent youth and often allow youth to have access to programming closer to home.

Juvenile Correctional Facilities in Ohio:

Over the past ten years, the DYS population has changed dramatically, due in part to significant financial incentives by DYS to counties to retain youth locally and keep youth who can be served safely, more effectively, and less expensively in their communities.

In January 2015, the average daily population of DYS was 471 youth, down from 1,679 youth in 2003. The average length of stay for youth in DYS facilities in FY14 was 10.9 months. In 2001, DYS operated ten facilities across the state; today DYS operates three correctional facilities for male youth: Circleville, Cuyahoga Hills, and Indian River. A private facility run by Lighthouse Youth Services, Paint Creek, also houses boys committed to DYS. For girls, DYS contracts with the Montgomery County Center for Adolescent Services (CAS), Applewood Center, Pomegranate Health Systems, and Buckeye Ranch (which currently does not house DYS youth).

Conditions in DYS facilities have changed significantly over the years. In 2008, DYS entered into a settlement agreement with the Children’s Law Center and other lawyers to address youths’ treatment while housed in DYS facilities. Since that time, DYS has taken positive action to improve conditions in its facilities, including restructuring the release process and changing its approach to mental health, health, and dental care, education, behavior management and discipline. The results also include significant reductions in the use of isolation and restraint, and improved professional standards and training for staff within the facilities.

Unfortunately, the majority of youth being sent to DYS facilities are low- and moderate-risk youth. Data analysis shows that 66% of youth sent to DYS facilities scored low- or moderate-risk of reoffending on the Ohio Youth Assessment System (OYAS) tool, which is an objective instrument designed to measure a youth’s future risk of reoffending. In addition, 5% of youth placed in DYS facilities had not been assessed using the OYAS. Therefore, only 29% of youth placed in DYS facilities by juvenile court judges scored at high-risk of reoffending.

Most youth in DYS facilities are given indeterminate sentences, meaning courts give youth a minimum amount of time to spend in the facility without a determinate end date; however, some youth in DYS are sentenced to “juvenile life,” meaning they must remain in DYS facilities until age 21. Youth are released through a process led by the release authority (RA), which starts as soon as a youth arrives at a facility. The process consists of an initial assessment, an individualized reentry plan, and release reviews to monitor the youth’s progress. The reviews include the youth, the youth’s family, parole staff, and institution staff. At the conclusion of each review, the youth may be approved for release, approved with an extra 60 days of DYS time, or denied with no more than 180 days added to the sentence. If a youth is denied release, another review date is established; however, a youth’s sentence cannot extend past a certain point unless they are involved in a serious incident or cannot be safely placed in the community for treatment or because they are a serious risk for violent reoffending. The reviews are shared with various stakeholders, including the court, the youth’s family, and the regional parole office.

DYS facilities provide a wide range of programming to youth, including education, behavioral health and substance abuse services, medical and dental care, recreation, religious services, community service opportunities, reentry services, victim awareness, sex offender programming, and gang interventions. Treatment targets a variety of issues including conduct disorders, anger, aggression, violence, depression, anxiety, self-injury, sleep disturbances, and more. In collaboration with the Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio, all three DYS facilities house Freedom Schools, which supplement traditional education programming and are designed to help students holistically move toward positive social engagement and learning.

Costs: The average cost to house a youth in a DYS facility in fiscal year 2014 was \$561.28/day for an annual cost of nearly \$202,500 per youth.

Outcomes and Recidivism: It is important to note that DYS defines recidivism as youth who were released from a DYS facility and who are readmitted to a DYS facility or are sentenced to the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections as an adult; therefore, this number does not count any lesser contacts with the system (such as arrests or cases filed but the youth was not sent to a correctional facility).

DYS tracks recidivism for youth who leave DYS facilities for three years after their release. For youth released in 2010, over the course of three years an increasingly higher percentage of these youth recidivated, rising from 22.7% of the youth released in 2010 recidivating one year after release to 37.2% two years after release and ending at 45% three years after release. Comparing youth released in different years, from 2004-2010, the three-year recidivism numbers dropped from 52.7% to 45%. However, the most recently recorded one and two year recidivism rates have shown that a 3.2% and 0.8% increase respectively. Males have a higher rate of recidivism than females, but youth who obtain a high school diploma or GED have significantly lower rates of return. Furthermore, the 2012 recidivism rates show a steep decline in recidivism depending on the youth’s age; younger youth had higher recidivism rates, while youth released at 21 had the lowest rate at 6.7%.

Conclusion:

The number of youth housed at DYS facilities has dropped substantially over the years with the rise of community based alternatives, which research shows are less expensive, more effective in reducing recidivism, and keep youth close to home. Although there has been a substantial drop in the DYS facility population, the number of youth who are low- and moderate-risk sent to these facilities remain high, which research shows may increase future recidivism. Ohio should continue to reduce the DYS population and keep youth in their communities.

Resources:

Taft, Bob. *Serious Youthful Offenders.: Executive Order 2001-01T* (January 5, 2001).

Ohio Department of Youth Services, *Monthly Fact Sheet: February 2015*, (February 4, 2015), available at <http://www.dys.ohio.gov/DNN/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=MZTNHvDmLRo%3d&tabid=117&mid=885>.

Ohio Department of Youth Services, *2014 Recidivism Report* (2014), available at <http://www.dys.ohio.gov/DNN/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=lj9YEO1N8zA%3d&tabid=117&mid=879>.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration* (2011), available at <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-NoPlaceForKidsFullReport-2011.pdf>.

**This fact sheet is one of a fact sheet series about Ohio’s juvenile justice system
by the Ohio Juvenile Justice Association.**

**If you have any questions, please visit OJJA’s website or
contact Erin Davies with the Juvenile Justice Coalition at edavies@jiohio.org or 614-400-5548.**