



John Howard Association of Illinois

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PRIORITIES FOR THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2008 - 2009

For the past two years the John Howard Association of Illinois has closely monitored the new Department of Juvenile Justice as it reshapes itself into an agency that responds to the needs of troubled youth and helps them become contributing members of their communities. With support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Association has now completed a comprehensive analysis of progress in the first eighteen months of the Department's existence. Our analysis puts us in a position to offer specific recommendations for consideration as the legislature makes budgetary decisions in the coming weeks.

Our specific recommendations focus on selected areas in which we have made observations and can speak with confidence. The good news we are finding about the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice is that within it are the foundations of some good programs and some very promising methods and practices which, with a modest investment, should provide considerable return. A few relatively small expenditures, if included in the budget, will move the Department a long way in the right direction. Our recommendations are intended to help state government avoid a "penny-wise but pound-foolish" situation by investing in budget items that have a favorable cost-benefit ratio.

With this in mind our five specific recommendations are as follows:

1. Fill Additional Line Staff Positions

An essential major need at the Department is for an increase in line security staff, currently called Corrections Officers but soon to be known as Juvenile Justice Specialists. As visitors and observers at all eight Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice Youth Centers, the John Howard Association of Illinois has seen first hand that there are too few Corrections Officers in the Department. One result is the inefficiency of the state paying excessive overtime, and another is a workforce which is increasingly stretched past reasonable limits. We have seen the fatigue on the faces of officers who have served double shifts. We have observed that simple tasks that would benefit youth, such as accompanying them to recreation, simply can't take place due to a shortage of officers.

The Department anticipates bringing on a class of 25 to 30 new employees after this year's budget is approved. This is a minimal addition, barely making up for

positions lost due to attrition in the last year. Given that contemporary staffing standards provide that there be one staff member for every eight youth during waking hours and one staff member to every twelve youth at night, and that in some Youth Centers the ratios are as high as one staff member to twenty youth during the day and one staff member to forty-five youth at night, this increase won't resolve the problem. But it will help.

2. Add 10 Teachers and Vocational Instructors

The Department of Juvenile Justice has had an insufficient number of teachers in place to provide full-time education to all youth committed to its care. Additionally, a number of institutions lacked the vocational instructors required to operate vocational programs even though they have the equipment and space on hand to do so. In August 2007 IYC Pere Marquette and IYC Warrenville, our two youth centers for girls, had equipped classrooms in place to operate a nail technician program and a beautician's program, respectively, but lacked instructors. IYC Pere Marquette also has the beginnings of a horticulture program started by talented volunteers. IYC St. Charles, which has a greenhouse in place, could add a horticultural program to its vocational programs by simply hiring an instructor. We emphasize horticultural programs because the Department has excellent programs at Murphysboro and Harrisburg on which the Department can readily build. The program at Pere Marquette has already led to individuals gaining marketable skills resulting in employment.

At this time the Department still has unfilled teacher and vocational instructor positions which, however, are provided for in the current and proposed budget. We have hopes that the filling of the District 428 Superintendent position in April will speed up hiring these unfilled positions. We all know this requires cooperation from other executive agencies.

The John Howard Association of Illinois's assessment is that it will take ten more positions to adequately staff teacher positions and to fill the vocational teacher slots that are needed to make use of facilities that are currently not being put to use. We understand that the budget proposal includes funds for those ten new teaching positions. The cost of those ten positions and promptly filling them is marginal compared to the benefits of operating a complete educational program and making use of buildings and equipment now in place for vocational programs.

3. Developing "Reentry" or Aftercare Services

Our analysis reveals that several Youth Facilities are operating programs or providing services which are helping to prepare youth for their return to their families or communities. But in most instances, there is no staff capability to take the next logical step of making arrangements for, or monitoring, the youth's progress after they leave the Youth Center and return to the community. The results are that released youth get back

into trouble. This is frustrating to Department staff. In the coming year, the aftercare staff persons that are in the proposed budget will begin to implement aftercare services and programs. At some Youth Centers, aftercare preparation could be greatly improved by adding one or two counselors with expanded responsibilities. In other instances, a case manager based in the community to counsel and assist a youth and his or her family, linked to staff and services that were initiated while the youth was in custody, will help make the most of work that is being done within youth facilities.

In order to take the necessary first steps we urge the legislature to support the Department in finalizing new job descriptions for Youth and Family Specialist positions and that the legislature authorize the full first year implementation of aftercare services which are in the current budget request. It is also important that the Department be staffed with a full compliment of counselors at several Youth Centers, notably Harrisburg, Murphysboro, Pere Marquette, Joliet and St. Charles.

4. Establishing an Internal Capacity for Professional Training

As new staff members are added, and all staff members are asked to function in new and different ways, there is a critical need for adequate training. Within the current Department of Juvenile Justice there are many talented individuals and innovative or superior practices which could serve as models for the rest of the Department. Unfortunately, some of these exist only at one facility and remain unknown to staff in other Youth Centers. The John Howard Association of Illinois believes that the addition of just four professional trainers could help replicate and expand best practices that have been developed and are being used to good effect in different Youth Centers. .

For example, at IYC Warrenville, counselors and mental health staff developed a therapeutic approach to disruptive behavior by girls, first developed for girls on the Youth Center's mental health unit and then expanded for use throughout the Youth Center. Security staff have now adopted this approach and one result is a reduction in the use of confinement. Staff at IYC Chicago put in place a program designed to encourage positive behavior that seems effective. Staff at IYC Kewanee developed and put to use a program which led boys to develop empathy with nursing home residents and participate in community service projects such as writing letters and making door decorations. These are but a few examples of efforts which, with modest investment in training resources, could be implemented in most if not all of the Department's Youth Centers.

The staff of the John Howard Association of Illinois believes that the omission of funds for internal training in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's 2009 fiscal year budget is a major oversight. The Department's only training resources consist of the shared services of one employee of the Illinois Department of Corrections. The lack of training capability is even more egregious because the Department has selected an entirely new curriculum appropriate for youth corrections staff and professionals but lacks trainers to provide instruction using the new curriculum.

The John Howard Association recommends that the legislature add the following to the budget proposal:

4 co-trainers at \$65,000 base plus fringe	\$338,000
1 clerical at \$35,000 base plus fringe	46,500
Travel	32,000
Equipment	16,000
Lease of three vehicles	18,000
Total	\$450,000

5. Support for Recreation for Kids

Recreation for incarcerated youth serves several purposes. It fills hours that, when empty, feed youth's frustration, anger and resentment. Activities such as cookouts are, staff tell us, great motivators of positive behavior. Participation in team and individual competitive sports teaches social skills such as cooperation, tolerance and team work. Recreation is important to the physical development and health of all youth.

The Illinois Department of Corrections has prohibited its facilities from spending state funds to provide recreational equipment and supplies. Funds for this purpose are gleaned from volunteers including staff, local charities and churches, and the inmate benefit fund. For most Youth Centers, these sources of funds are limited. As a result Youth Centers have to scrounge for sports equipment, art supplies, trophies that award a youth's superior achievement, and the refreshments that celebrate the end of a tournament. Staff often volunteer time to hold cookouts for the youth, but then are also forced to buy the hamburgers, buns, catsup and soft drinks themselves.

Any rationale for prohibiting state expenditures on recreational equipment for adult prisoners makes no sense when applied to youth in correctional facilities. The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's staff tell us about the value recreational activities have for incarcerated youth. For example, for the past two summers boys at IYC St. Charles have played baseball in teams organized by living unit. Staff members report that gang affiliations fell away as each cottage competed to have the best team and win the playoffs at the end of the season. Youth who were in a therapeutic mental health programs reportedly made tremendous progress, not just in their skill at sports, but at their ability to work together. But the equipment for these games has to be scrounged. In other Youth Centers, such as Warrenville and Harrisburg, there are outdoor recreational areas but no equipment that would be needed for their use.

The John Howard Association of Illinois recommends a supplement to the budget of just \$100 per incarcerated youth, or \$130,000, for use as the Director sees fit to provide recreational equipment and supplies that will make a difference to the youth and staff trying to implement good recreational activities at each Youth Center.

In addition the Department's proposed budget should provide for an additional 6 Leisure Time Activity Specialists, a cost we estimate to be \$375,000. Leisure Time Activity Specialists put together recreational activities, organize team sports and competitions, and supervise many of them. Their work lightens the load on Youth Supervisors and Counselors. The Department has facilities that are unused or underutilized because of a lack of Leisure Time Activity Specialists. For example, Warrenville can't make full use of its well-equipped gym for team sports like basketball.

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These are our budget recommendations at this time. As we continue in our monitoring and evaluation of the new Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, our part of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change initiative in Illinois, we will continue to identify needs and also to look for savings and efficiencies in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice.

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