

## **Juvenile Justice Coalition: Statement on DYS and DRC Shared Services December 2017**

Today Governor Kasich's office announced an extensive plan of sharing services between Ohio's Department of Youth Services (DYS) – which oversees rehabilitating Ohio children who become involved in the juvenile court system (including over 80,000 youth in Ohio's communities and the 500 youth in Ohio's youth prisons) – and the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC) – which oversees the 50,000 adults held in adult prisons. Unfortunately, we believe this plan is not in the best interest of Ohio's youth, communities, and taxpayers.

We are concerned that this plan may have a harmful effect on Ohio's children and has the potential to reverse decades of work to improve how the state treats youth. Children have unique developmental needs that are very different from adults. DYS's sole focus on youth – one of the few agencies in Ohio to do so – has resulted in the creation of nationally recognized youth-specific programs that produce significant positive results and have saved Ohio taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. Unfortunately, in larger agencies that serve both youth and adults, children's unique developmental characteristics and needs tend to be overwhelmed in part due to the sheer size difference between the populations they serve. Other states who have undergone a merger of the youth and adult prison agencies have reported less focused attention on children. While the proposed shared services have been characterized as back office services, they also include items like human resources and staff training, research, and religious and volunteer services, with education still on the table to be shared. Several of these functions could have a direct impact on youth, such as staff receiving specific youth development training, and the proposal to co-locate the agencies leaves the door open to continue to merge the two agencies.

It is unclear how this plan will bring cost-savings or efficiencies to Ohio's taxpayers. No documentation has been provided on 1) the amount of taxpayer dollars already spent on contemplating sharing services, including hiring a consultant and time spent by current agency staff, 2) the costs of physically co-locating both agencies and their staff, and 3) what the projected cost-savings and efficiencies of any of the actions listed in the shared services recommendations will be. In fact, the only dollar amount that has been provided is an *increase* in rent by nearly \$700,000 each year – nearly \$3.5 million every 5 years. We believe this funding could be spent more effectively on research- and evidence-based programming for youth. For example, the Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) program is funded at \$2.5 million annually and serves youth in 12 counties who have mental health challenges and are medium- or high-risk to reoffend by supporting them in their communities rather than placing them in a DYS facility. BHJJ produces strong positive outcomes for youth – including decreasing trauma symptoms, improving educational outcomes, less substance use, and decreasing recidivism – while saving the state \$200,000 per youth by avoiding DYS facility placement (FY14 numbers).

If Ohio is looking to find efficiencies, a more effective strategy would be to increase the state's focus on children – such as forming a youth-specific agency and budget that addresses youths' needs more comprehensively and makes smart investments that pay off over the long-term. Ohio needs more – not less – truly effective, youth-based programs that can get Ohio children on the right path and result in huge cost-savings to Ohio's communities