



John Howard Association of Illinois

70 East Lake Street, Suite 1116 Chicago, IL 60601  
Tel. 312-291-9183 Fax. 312-526-3714 www.thejha.org

December 1, 2015

The Honorable Bruce Rauner  
Office of the Governor  
207 State House Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Rauner:

We write to supplement our correspondence of October 14, 2015 and again respectfully urge that your administration close the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's Youth Center at Kewanee. On October 30th and November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the court-appointed monitors in the R.J. vs Jones litigation filed reports on the status of mental health, education, and safety and welfare of the children in IDJJ. The reports make plain the urgent need to close the youth center at Kewanee.

In June 2015 your office announced it would "begin the process of identifying one or two juvenile justice correctional facilities for closure." The announcement observed that the IDJJ has "a surplus of capacity," namely "capacity of approximately 1,200 beds, with less than 700 occupied." See News Release of 6/2/15.

Indeed, the average number of children in Illinois' state juvenile prisons is at an historic low – 606 statewide in a state prison system of six facilities with a combined 1,242 bed capacity. This decrease is due in significant part to the state's shift of resources to less costly and more effective community based alternatives through Redeploy Illinois. At the point Redeploy was created in 2005, the state's juvenile prison population was just over 1,600. The population has decreased more than 50% in the past decade, encouraged by the Redeploy fiscal incentives to counties to keep children at home with community-based services.

Illinois is to be commended for the decrease in the population of our juvenile facilities and for thoughtfully shifting resources to provide the most benefit to our justice-involved youth and the public as a whole. Given this, and the 636 vacant beds in our Illinois Youth Centers, it makes sense immediately to close at least one more facility. Operating juvenile facilities is enormously expensive for the state of Illinois, and these institutions are unable to provide outcomes that argue for investment in them.

Closing Kewanee makes sense for several reasons: it is located in an isolated location, it has long term difficulty in attracting and retaining adequate staff, and its physical design was intended for adults rather than children. The findings of the experts in the R.J. litigation make a clear case for closing this facility.

The R.J. expert on mental health, Dr. Louis Kraus, concluded:

***Treatment at IYC Kewanee continues to be a significant concern. I am unclear why a facility that is most lacking in licensed mental health professionals and security would be the facility where we send our most significant mentally ill youth in IDJJ.***

The R.J. expert on education, Professor Peter Leone, noted:

***The staffing at St. Charles and Kewanee and until this past June, at Pere Marquette, is particularly bad. During this past year, students at these facilities on average received less than one half the instructional time to which they were entitled.***

The experts' observations support key observations from the John Howard Association's most recent report on Kewanee, all of which are reasons to close Kewanee:

- Kewanee remains a problematic facility, largely due to understaffing, for high-risk, high-need youth who most need treatment and programming.
- The facility has longstanding difficulty attracting and retaining the staff needed to maintain safety and ensure appropriate care.
- Understaffing is particularly unwise and harmful for youth with acute mental health needs, who need individualized mental health treatment plans and treatment.
- Location remains a frequent barrier to contacts with families and counsel.
- Kewanee requires costly physical plant improvements.
- JHA continues to have serious concerns about safety at this facility.

For these reasons, we, the undersigned, recommend that you close IYC Kewanee.

Sincerely,



Jenny Vollen Katz  
Director  
John Howard Assoc.



Mary Dixon  
Legislative Director  
ACLU of Illinois



Elizabeth Clarke  
President  
Juvenile Justice Initiative

Cc: Candice Jones, Samantha Gaddy, Beth Compton, Mary Reynolds, Mike Zolnierowicz, Aaron Winters, Tim Nuding



John Howard Association of Illinois

70 East Lake Street, Suite 1116 Chicago, IL 60601  
Tel. 312-291-9183 Fax. 312-526-3714 [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org)