

# JUVENILE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

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March 25, 2016

Senator Donne Trotter  
Representative Donald Moffitt  
Co-Chairs  
Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability  
703 Stratton Office Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: Kewanee IYC Facility Closure Hearing March 30, 2016

Dear COGFA Co-Chairs and Members:

The Juvenile Justice Initiative supports the proposal of the Director of the Department of Juvenile Justice to close the IYC-Kewanee, based on the dramatic decrease in IDJJ population. The closure of this outdated large institution is a critical step in the Department's plan to "right-size" the Department by moving youth in IDJJ custody to evidence-based small facilities/community based alternatives close to their home.

**Decrease in juvenile prison population in Illinois.** While the current Director and staff have worked diligently to improve conditions within the juvenile facilities, it is simply not sustainable to administer operations at six separate facilities with a total capacity of housing 989 youth for the rapidly diminishing juvenile population now hovering around 400 youth.

And let me pause for a moment so we can reflect on the tremendous progress this state has made in shifting from large institutional prisons to community-based alternatives. In 2012, when JJI testified in support of the proposed closure of IYC Joliet, we noted that Illinois had a diminished juvenile prison population hovering around 1,000 but was operating eight juvenile prisons with a total bed capacity of 1,754 youth. Since that time, Illinois has closed two juvenile prisons and shifted to single occupancy rooms all while raising the age of juvenile court from 17 to 18– yet, still has a rapidly decreasing juvenile prison population along with an abundance of juvenile beds thanks to a corresponding investment in community-based alternatives.

Illinois has implemented evidence-based programs through fiscal incentives including Redeploy Illinois, and local policy shifts in detention alternatives. From its beginning in 2005 through 2014, Redeploy Illinois provided individualized intensive community based alternatives to more than 2,500 youth and resulted in a 58% decrease in incarceration from 42 counties – with an average cost per youth of \$5,912, and an annual budget under \$5 million. The \$14.2 million dollar savings anticipated from the closure of IYC Kewanee would cover the full annual budget of Redeploy and still leave nearly \$10 million additional state dollars for fiscal reinvestment.

We also note, this “right-sizing” is part of a national trend to shift state financial investment from costly and ineffective institutional care to individualized community based care. As a national report noted, **18 states have closed over 50 juvenile prisons since 2007**. States are closing large-scale juvenile prisons based on evidence that large, remote institutions are the least effective in rehabilitation. As other states have concluded, good public policy and smart budgeting argue for closure of large-scale juvenile prisons with a shift of savings to reinvestment in community-based alternatives. States including Texas, Ohio and New York have shifted some of the savings to community based care, and New York has shifted additional savings to fiscal reinvestment in upstate towns with prison closures.

**Economic impact.** The Department has estimated the fiscal impact of closure of IYC Kewanee on the employees and the surrounding community, but we believe there is a critical additional fiscal impact that must be weighed against the economic impact on the Kewanee community. We are talking about an industry based on locking up children – and there is an enormous fiscal impact on the children who are incarcerated, on their families and on their communities that must be balanced against the economic interests of the community where the children are incarcerated.

The first negative impact upon children and their families is the detrimental impact on family stability and the maintenance of family relationships. The John Howard Association noted that a disproportionate number of children in IYC Kewanee are from the Chicago area and never receive any family visits due to Kewanee’s remote geographic location. [Footnote 22 on page 9 of the JHA 2014 IYC Kewanee monitoring report documented that 43% of the children incarcerated in Kewanee IYC came from Cook County, as of February, 2015.] To the extent that children have to be removed from their home, they should be placed in small group home facilities located within or near their community.

The second negative impact is the challenge to emotional, behavioral and physical health during incarceration. Mental health and substance abuse issues are exacerbated during incarceration, with long-term negative impact, particularly on children. [See The Northwestern Juvenile Project, <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/234522.pdf>] These negative issues are particularly aggravated in IYC Kewanee due to the well documented difficulties attracting and retaining programmatic and therapeutic staff.

The third negative impact is the challenge to building economic security through education and employment due to the stigma of incarceration and the interruption to education.

All of these negative economic impacts are documented in a recent national report by the Ella Baker Center – *Who Pays: The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*. [www.whopaysreport.org](http://www.whopaysreport.org) As the report notes:

*...costs run deeper than budget line items and extend far beyond the sentences served. These costs are rarely quantified and measured and primarily impact incarcerated populations and the families and communities from whom they are separated, the same people who are already stigmatized, penalized, and punished.*

**Racial disparities** - What is even more troubling is that these negative economic impacts fall disproportionately upon minority communities. Although less than 20% of the state’s youth population is Black (as of CY2013), the IDJJ reported that 65% of the youth in IDJJ facilities were Black in January of 2016. This is even more troubling when combined with the fact that 56.3% of the IDJJ population were incarcerated based on Class 2 or lower felonies, with only 2% incarcerated for murder and 12.8% for Class X felonies. In fact, as of January 2016, 85% (378 youth) of the IDJJ institutionalized population was eligible for Redeploy Illinois alternatives – a clear argument for closure of IYC Kewanee and reinvestment in Redeploy Illinois community-based alternatives.

Closing outdated large-scale institutional prisons, such as Kewanee, and shifting the savings to investment in community-based programming is consistent with research on best practice, as well as the most effective approach to ensure public safety.

**In conclusion** - For too long we have invested scarce state resources in institutional confinement, spending over \$100 million annually to confine youth, but less than \$5 million at the front end to keep youth out through Redeploy Illinois – and providing few resources to keep youth from returning through juvenile aftercare services. Despite the miniscule state investment to keep youth out of confinement, we have seen dramatic reductions in the number of youth committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. Shifting some of the savings from closing one – or more – youth facilities to community-based alternatives would continue this positive trend of reduced juvenile offending, thereby improving public safety and providing more resources for youth across the state. A report from the Annie E Casey Foundation, *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, (Oct., 2011), [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org) concludes, there is now “overwhelming evidence that the wholesale incarceration of juvenile offenders is a failed strategy” for reducing juvenile crime. Further, the federal Dept. of Justice, reviewed a longitudinal study (Pathways to Desistance, funded by the MacArthur Foundation) on juvenile offenders that included findings documenting the inefficacy of longer juvenile incarcerations on decreasing repeat offending. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/publications/PubAbstract.asp?pubi=253020>

The Juvenile Redeploy Illinois 2014 Annual Report says it best:

*From the human perspective, the approximately 2,500 youth served in the program over the past nine years have been provided with a second chance at becoming contributing, law-abiding citizens of their respective communities. In 2014, 483 of the 506 youth referred to the Redeploy program were provided with this second chance. Beyond saving dollars, the program mends lives and saves families.*

Executive Summary, Redeploy Illinois Annual Report 2014,  
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=83186>

Thank you for your attention to this proposed facility closure. We will be happy to answer any questions or provide further information.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Clarke*

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President  
Juvenile Justice Initiative

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