

October 14 2015

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

Dear Governor Rauner:

We write to respectfully urge that your administration close the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's Youth Center at Kewanee.

Last June, 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 at 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 – less than 700 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 system involved youth. Given this, and the 542 vacant beds in our Illinois Youth Centers, the time is right to close at least one more facility. The administration alone of six far---flung facilities is unnecessarily costly – especially for such a small population (a population the equivalent of a mid---size high school).

Deciding which of the six juvenile facilities to close is not difficult. It's isolated location, difficulty attracting and retaining adequate staff, and the physical design that was intended for adults rather than children, all indicate that IYC Kewanee should be closed.

The key observations from the John Howard Association's most recent report on Kewanee, clarify the many reasons to close Kewanee:

- Kewanee remains a problematic facility, largely due to chronic understaffing, for high---risk, high---need youth who most need treatment and programming.
- Understaffing is particularly unwise and harmful for youth with acute mental

- health needs, wherein youth need individualized mental health treatment plans and treatment.
- Location remains a frequent barrier to contacts with families and counsel.
 - Kewanee requires physical plant improvement.
 - Although Kewanee houses challenging populations, the facility would benefit from fully implementing positive incentive programs in use at other facilities.
 - Alternative Placement disciplinary methods appear ineffective as currently structured.
 - JHA continues to have serious concerns about safety at this facility.

The Court--appointed monitors in the *R.J.* lawsuit have identified similar problems at the Kewanee Youth Center.

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