

GETTING SMART ABOUT JUVENILE JUSTICE IN FLORIDA

REPORT OF THE BLUEPRINT COMMISSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

da's juvenile justice system is blazing a new path.

Since the Department of Juvenile Justice was established in 1994, the State and the Department have taken a "Get Tough" approach to juvenile crime. Today, while overall juvenile crime rates are down, policy makers, experts in juvenile crime, youth advocates and community leaders agree that Florida's juvenile justice system lacks the capacity to provide the spectrum of services needed to significantly impact juvenile crime and public safety for the long term.

It is time for Florida to Get Smart about juvenile justice.

In July 2007, Governor Charlie Crist authorized creation of the Blueprint Commission as a time-limited workgroup charged with developing recommendations to reform Florida's juvenile justice system. "Florida's lifeblood is its children and young people, including those who may have gotten into trouble by taking a wrong turn," said Governor Crist in announcing the Commission. "We must always remember that we can never give up on our young people."

The Blueprint Commission's 25 members traveled the state, holding public hearings and receiving testimony from a host of stakeholders – community leaders, law enforcement and court officers, representatives of the public school systems, health and mental health officials, parents, youth, advocates, national experts in juvenile justice and Department staff.

They learned

Communities, which bear the burden of providing prevention services for at-risk youth, have limited capacity and resources with which to respond.

Public school systems – themselves under stress – increasingly are using Zero Tolerance practices to send youth into the juvenile justice system rather than apply alternative methods of discipline.

Even in the face of a decline in overall juvenile justice system referrals, the use of secure detention (jail-like setting) is increasing. Florida places youth in secure detention and in residential commitment at rates that exceed national norms.

There is a growing proportion of girls in the juvenile justice system, which presents a host of health, mental health and programmatic challenges.

There is a disproportionate number of minorities in the system – and the disproportion grows worse the deeper into the system you go.

At all levels, across gender and race, the health and mental health needs of youth in the juvenile justice system are extraordinary, with two-thirds of youth, in some cases, having mental-health or substance-abuse issues.

Through all of these challenges, the Department of Juvenile Justice is struggling to keep pace. Direct-care staff is poorly equipped, compensation is low, and annual turnover ranges from 35% to 66%, depending on the employee category.

The members of the Blueprint Commission, working with expert advisors, identified 52 recommendations for change, organized under seven guiding principles and 12 key goals that are designed to be implemented over multiple years. (A complete listing can be found beginning on Page 49 or in Appendix VII on Page 84.)

Though the recommendations are extensive and diverse, they can be summarized as follows:

The State of Florida needs to invest in a continuum of services that can provide the right services at the right time in the least-restrictive environment, while continuing to provide serious sanctions for youth involved in serious and violent crime, where appropriate.

Florida should invest in community-based programs that help keep kids out of trouble.

Florida should develop alternative programs and interventions at the community level to prevent youth who do not pose a public safety or flight risk from placement in secure detention.

For those youth who require commitment to residential facilities, Florida should provide facilities that are small, that provide good educational and skill-building programs, and that best prepare youth for return to their communities.

Florida must provide gender-specific programming that effectively addresses the needs of girls in the juvenile justice system. And it must address the disproportionate presence of minorities in the system.

Florida must provide adequate resources to meet the mental and physical health needs of youth in the juvenile justice system.

Florida must invest in the human resources that provide direct care services to youth in the system and develop a more professional and stable workforce.

And at every point, Florida should implement only those programs and strategies that are evidence-based, that have been demonstrated to be effective in protecting public safety while at the same time providing an optimum future for our youth.

The Department of Juvenile Justice's new Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles outline the Department's commitment to be child-centered and family focused while, at the same time, reducing juvenile delinquency and improving public safety. (See Appendix I, Page 56.)

The findings and recommendations of the Blueprint Commission are intended to guide and support the Department, and the State, along this new path.

JUVENILE JUSTICE IN FLORIDA AT A GLANCE

(All data 2006-2007 unless otherwise noted)

Florida Population
Ages 10-17 1,911,307

YOUTH IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Youth referred to DJJ 91,497
Total referrals 146,765

Of Youth Referred
Male 64,194
Female 23,303

Of Total Referrals - most serious charge:
Misdemeanor 70,285
Felony 48,471
Other 28,009

Minority over-representation

	White	Black	Hispanic
Florida population age 10-17	53%	21%	22%
Total referrals	45%	39%	13%
Total commitments	36%	52%	10%

Health Status
63% of youth in care of DJJ exhibit mental illness.
68% exhibit substance abuse

DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

Budget \$703,744,900¹
Total employees 5,011

Direct Care Employees 7,600
Employed by State of Florida (DJJ) 35%
Employed by private contractors 50-66%

Starting Salaries
State (DJJ) employees \$23,482
Private employees \$19,780

Annual Turnover Rate
State (DJJ) employees 26%
Private employees 50%

PREVENTION SERVICES \$68,027,425

100% privatized State of Florida operates no prevention programs. DJJ oversees contracts and/or grants for 153 private contractors with a budget of \$68 million.

Youth Served 31,961
Residential programs 5,439
Non-residential programs 26,522

Largest provider Florida Network of Youth and Family Services - \$32-million contract.

DIVERSION \$162,819,126

Referrals diverted from court 37,380
25% of all referrals are diverted from court

SECURE DETENTION \$137,527,306

Total admissions 54,369
Youth admitted 32,023
37% of all referrals result in admission to secure detention.

Average Daily Population in Secure Detention 1,831
Equivalent to 95 per 100,000 population age 10-17
National average 88 per 100,000

Number of detention centers 26
Capacity 2,057
23 centers operated at more than 100% capacity at least once during the year

RESIDENTIAL COMMITMENTS \$306,211,807

102 residential facilities housing 5,874 beds
80% privatized - DJJ operates 19 programs with 824 beds

Average Daily Population in Residential Commitment 5,500
Equivalent to 285 per 100,000 population age 10-17
National average 219 per 100,000

¹ Includes \$29,159,236 for executive direction