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Reforms at Ohio's Department of Youth Services Lead Federal Court to Approve Negotiated Agreement to Reduce Monitoring

More work still to do, but both sides agree that substantial improvements have been made

Columbus, Ohio — In recognition of the progress that the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) has made in implementing system-wide reforms since 2008, yesterday U.S. District Court Judge Algenon Marbley approved a comprehensive joint agreement between the Department and youth advocates to reduce monitoring at DHS facilities.

DYS has reached a total of 1000 goals and objectives in its master plan for reform. The order reduces court oversight due to the agency's gains in the following categories: access to counsel, use of force, general education, vocational education, dental services, grievances, reentry, regionalization, access to phones, training and classification. The order also terminates court oversight of intervention hearings and youth discipline, except for those youth with mental health needs.

Along with juvenile courts, the agency now relies on a continuum of programs and interventions to serve youth closer to their families and in the least restrictive appropriate setting. The intensity of treatment and community supervision is now matched with a youth's risk to reoffend. As a result, the DHS average daily population has decreased from 1,842 in 2007 to less than 600 in 2012.

"We have been entrusted with the responsibility of Ohio's most troubled kids," said Department of Youth Services Director Harvey Reed. "Helping these young people change their lives is our most important work as we set out to build a safer Ohio. That's why we've worked hard to reform juvenile justice in Ohio to serve the right youth in the right place with the right treatment."

"The overriding message is that a lot has gone right these past few years," said Alphonse Gerhardstein, one of the attorneys representing youth. "We will finish our work improving youth treatment in a cooperative fashion that produces the best results for youth."

Focused court monitoring will continue for youth in the area of mental health and in the special management unit. Limited court monitoring will continue in a few areas based on quality assurance reviews.

DYS is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio and is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. DYS operates four juvenile correctional facilities, provides parole services from five regional sites and funds and supports over 610 direct service programs throughout the state.

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