



NC Department of Public Safety
JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

Josh Stein, Governor

Eddie M. Buffaloe Jr., Secretary
William L. Lassiter, Deputy Secretary

Cari Carson
Disability Rights North Carolina
801 Corporate Center Drive
Suite 118
Raleigh, NC 27607

December 18, 2025

RE: NC-DJJDP Response to Disability Rights North Carolina

Ms. Carson,

The North Carolina Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) appreciates the opportunity to address some of the concerns raised by Disability Rights North Carolina following their visits to all state-run and county-run juvenile detention centers statewide. While DJJDP recognizes there are challenging circumstances taking place in our facilities often due to circumstances over which DJJDP has little control, DJJDP does not concur with all the findings in your report. However, rather than disputing these discrepancies, this letter will focus on solutions and identify where additional resources are needed to address these issues.

Both DJJDP and Disability Rights NC share the common objective of ensuring that all confined youth in North Carolina have access to high-quality educational services, behavioral health care, nutrition, and medical care. Additionally, we both aim for youth to have access to daily programming and recreational activities. We acknowledge that increased access to these services not only fosters healthy development for confined youth but also reduces recidivism and enhances public safety. Several obstacles have complicated the attainment of these goals, including high staff vacancy rates across facilities and overcrowding due to a growing juvenile population. Despite these challenges, DJJDP remains committed to adhering to all federal and state laws, as well as recognized best practices for serving confined juveniles.

Staffing Challenges

The biggest area of challenge in our facilities continues to be our high vacancy rates in direct care positions. In October of 2025, the DJJDP Facilities and Programs section collaborated with the DJJDP Human Resources section to launch an intensive hiring effort for three facility-based direct care positions (Youth Counselor Tech, Youth Behavioral Specialist, and Youth



Counselor). This effort has included three interview teams conducting full-day interviews three days a week, creating a temporary position that allows an employee to be hired quicker, creating a retention committee, and increasing hiring fair efforts localized to facilities that are experiencing the highest rates of vacancies. While we continue to have high vacancies, we are pleased to announce that these increased efforts have shown an improvement of 10% reduction in vacancies in Youth Counselor Tech positions. We acknowledge that there is still substantial progress to be made; however, we are encouraged by these figures and the positive trend.

DJJDP is not just struggling to keep front-line staff, but we are also losing facility supervisors due to low pay and salaries that are often not much higher than the staff they supervise. When staff become supervisors, they are no longer eligible for overtime which often leads to frontline staff making more than their supervisors. This discourages frontline staff from applying for supervisory positions. To deal with this challenge, DJJDP has worked hard to make these positions eligible for overtime and starting January 1, 2026 that will become a reality for these positions. This change will further enhance employee satisfaction and provide additional flexibility for these experienced, direct care staff.

If DJJDP is going to attract the workforce it needs to change youth's lives, we need to pay our employees a competitive salary. Since the amount we pay employees is specifically set in state law we need the General Assembly to act so we can increase these salaries. The current starting pay for a youth counselor tech is just above \$37,000 per year. In the Governor's budget and in both the proposed House and Senate budgets, these salaries were increased to a starting salary above \$40,000 per year. We need a final comprehensive budget passed so these new salary schedules can go into effect.

Maintenance and security equipment upgrades

The separation of Adult Correction from Department of Public Safety left juvenile justice with inadequate resources to handle the maintenance of our facilities. DJJDP is requesting from the General Assembly thirteen (13) additional maintenance staff, tools and equipment to address critical needs and optimize operational efficiency across regional facilities, including youth development centers, juvenile detention centers and Multipurpose Group Homes. This proposal would address many of the maintenance issues noted in the Disability Rights NC report.

Reducing Overcrowding

The General Assembly provided the Department with funding in their 2023 budget to build a new Juvenile Detention Center. However, those dollars are to be provided over three different budget cycles. The first allotment of \$1 million has already been provided to DJJDP for planning. DJJDP has engaged in the planning process with a designer and is now waiting for a comprehensive budget to be passed that will include the next set of funding. These additional beds would give DJJDP the capacity we need to get youth off dayroom floors for sleeping, so we can fully utilize these areas for the programming space for which they were intended. We are requesting capital funding needed to complete a 48-bed juvenile detention center project (**New Youth Detention Center**, DPS23-1). DJJDP has proposed the following funding language be included in the state budget: There is appropriated from the State Capital and Infrastructure Fund to the Office of State Budget and Management the sum of *(\$39,850,000)* in nonrecurring funds

for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to be allocated to the following project code: DPS23-1, **\$39,850,000**, as initially established in S.L. 2023-134.

Medical/Mental Health Crisis Unit

Youth admitted to secure custody facilities with severe injuries from gunshot wounds and critical mental health care crises are increasing. These youth are extremely resource intensive for DJJDP and often limit the programming other youth can receive due to significant staff time that must be dedicated toward this high-needs population. If DJJDP can remove this high-needs population to a facility where they can receive the level of care they need, that move would benefit all juveniles housed by DJJDP.

To better serve this population, DJJDP is proposing to create a 20-bed crisis unit that will provide specialized mental health and physical health care services to youth with high needs in those areas, offering services like hospitalization stepdown observation and alternative to psychiatric commitment. This unit will be housed within an existing JJDP secure custody facility and will be a staffed resource for trauma and crisis related monitoring. Depending on the severity of the case, as much typical programming as possible would be delivered in this environment (food/nutrition, education, counseling, recreation/movement, etc.).

Re-Entry Services

Regarding improving re-entry services, NC-DJJDP recently received grant funding from OJJDP for multi-year collaborations to focus on both delivering evidence-based services within facilities and improving re-entry work. In 2024, the Division received two OJJDP grants designed to strengthen North Carolina's juvenile justice system and advance our mission to reduce and prevent juvenile delinquency. These initiatives focus on effective intervention and treatment of youth to strengthen families and enhance public safety.

- **OJJDP System Reform Grant:** This project will conduct a comprehensive review of programming in state-operated juvenile facilities to ensure policies, practices, and programs align with national best practices. The goal is to improve outcomes for youth in custody and create a more effective, evidence-based system. Research Triangle Institute (RTI) will partner with the Division to lead these assessments.
- **OJJDP Second Chance Act Grant:** This project will deliver a data-driven evaluation of North Carolina's juvenile reentry system to identify gaps and strengthen services for youth returning to their communities. By improving policies and expanding resources, we aim to reduce recidivism and support successful reintegration. The Council of State Governments (CSG) will provide technical assistance throughout this effort.

Additionally, stepdown services are being enhanced in District 3 courtesy of 2023 OJJDP Second Chance Act federal grant funding. That pilot project combines independent living with the VOLT Center's vocational programming through an intensive case manager- allowing for multi-system support in the re-entry stage.

Community-Based Alternatives

In addition, DJJDP works hard to reserve detention services only for those youth that absolutely need them. All other juveniles should be served in the community with robust community-based

alternatives. To ensure these services are available and effective at addressing juvenile behavior, DJJDP is requesting that the state invest more in these services. Our budget request is as follows:

- **Community Programming (\$10,828,900) R**
 - **Inflationary Increases \$4,900,000 R** - Funding to sustain current services in Juvenile contracted residential sites and community-based services. Daily rates have increased due to inflationary cost increases. Maintains current bed capacity for the multipurpose group homes, transitional living programs, short-term residential programs and the crisis and assessment centers. Sustains funding to provide Functional Family Therapy in all 100 counties across the State and intensive, community-based treatment services.
 - **Juvenile Capacity Standard Implementation \$928,900 R** – [SL2023-114 \(H186\)](#) establishes a new juvenile capacity standard to stand trial. Methodist Home for Children provides remediation programming services to restore the juvenile’s capacity and avoid dismissal.
 - **JCPC Funds \$5,000,000 R** - Funding to maintain Juvenile Crime Prevention Council funded programs in all 100 counties across the state. Provides court ordered services and sanctions for juveniles. This funding has not increased in the last five years. Without inflationary increases in funding for these programs, many service providers will have to reduce services.

Room Confinement

As we have previously stated, the use of solitary confinement is not practiced within any North Carolina juvenile justice setting. We do acknowledge that our policy does provide a provision where a youth may be placed in their rooms for a period to regain composure, following an incident that jeopardized the health and safety of themselves or others, and this time is carefully monitored by facility leadership, behavioral health, and medical staff. DJJDP policy does not support the use of room confinement for punitive purposes. While a youth is in their room for both administrative and temporary room confinement, they must receive visits from behavioral health, health services, education, a facility supervisor, social worker, and as requested- the chaplain. Also, while a youth is in their room, they must continue receiving living conditions approximate to those youth in the general population.

The availability of educational services and large muscle activities is both a state and federal requirement for all youth in residential settings throughout the state. NC-DJJDP complies with all federal and state regulations and laws pertaining to the treatment and provision of services for all youth in state and county operated facilities.

In Partnership



William Lassiter
Deputy Secretary for Juvenile Justice
NC Department of Public Safety