

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD TO THE COOK COUNTY JUVENILE TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER (JTDC), 2022

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Overview

Pursuant to Cook County Ordinance Art VI. Div. 3. Sec. 2-511-520 (included as Appendix I), the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center Advisory Board (hereinafter "Advisory Board") shall submit to the Executive Director of the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (hereinafter "JTDC"), the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County, the Board of Commissioners for Cook County, and the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners an annual report containing public recommendations for actions which may be necessary for carrying out the mission,

purpose, and intent of the JTDC. The Advisory Board is charged with providing public recommendations on maximizing the use of current resources and meeting the population's physical, social, and psychological needs, as well as establishing public performance measures to track and measure the achievement of the JTDC's mission.

Introduction

Since 2018, The JTDC Advisory Board has focused its efforts on eliminating the use of punitive room confinement as a disciplinary strategy in the JTDC. In 2019, the Advisory Board released a report focused on the use of punitive room confinement in the JTDC, which led to a series of public hearings and conversations about the harmful impact of isolation on children in detention. In response to the JTDC report, together with other calls for action from the public, the Office of the Chief Judge appointed a Blue Ribbon Committee to study the issue of punitive room confinement. That Committee released a report in 2022 which, among other issues, indicates that youth in the JTDC are held in their rooms for more than 13 hours per day, regardless of punishment.

Following this report, in late 2022, the Office of the Chief Judge created an Implementation Committee, whose stated mission is to reduce the total number of hours youth in detention spend in isolation in their rooms. Although no members of the JTDC Advisory Board were asked to join this committee, Advisory Board members are hopeful that they will identify ways to support the efforts of the Implementation Committee and collaborate. The Advisory Board also hopes that the Implementation Committee will share their findings and decisions, including data on the use of punitive room confinement, in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability to the public.

Background and History

Prior to their efforts around punitive room confinement, the JTDC Advisory Board had adopted a focus on the trauma experienced by JTDC residents 1) through childhood prior to detention; 2) during detention; and 3) into post-release. Members were divided into three sub-committees focused on those three areas. Their year of study on these issues resulted in a report focused on the structure and distribution of programs available to youth during detention.

in the course of this year of inquiry, In May 2018, [a news story](#) in the Chicago Reporter by Jonah Newman described rates of solitary confinement climbing [as much as 25%](#) “even as the population shrunk.” According to the article, “Over the past two-and-a-half years (2016 to 2018), kids at the JTDC have been confined to their cells more than 55,000 times. Taken together, the time they’ve spent in solitary adds up to nearly 25 years.”

The Advisory Board found this news highly concerning. As a result, they decided to investigate the use of punitive room confinement in the JTDC and focus their work on mitigating the traumatic impacts of detention on youth, including the psychological, emotional, and developmental harms caused by the use of punitive room confinement. The Advisory Board met with Mr. Newman, along with many other national experts on the subject of youth isolation. Advisory Board members also interviewed youth who had been subject to punitive room confinement during their stay at the JTDC. The Advisory Board made multiple requests for data related to the use of punitive room confinement from the JTDC leadership and Office of the Chief Judge, including the number of hours youth were held in isolation, and causes for which youth had been placed in punitive room confinement. The Advisory Board also requested written policies on the use of punitive room confinement in the JTDC. As of February 2023, more than three years after our first request, the Advisory Board has still not received this data or these policies.

In 2019, the Advisory Board filed its report on the detrimental effects of solitary confinement on youth, which has been declared “torture” by the United Nations. The report included the continuing evolution of research about adolescent brain development which supports the conclusion that isolation as a form of punishment severely harms detained and incarcerated youth and significantly contributes to suicidal ideation across the lifespan. The use of isolation as a form of punishment can cause profound and lifelong psychological damage to children and adolescents and may lead to **self-harm, psychosis, and suicide**.

In 2020, in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Committee of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, the Advisory Board held a hearing on the use of punitive room confinement at the JTDC. This hearing took nearly a year to schedule, and even after a year, the hearing start time was delayed nearly seven hours while the meeting was scheduled with other Commissioner business. National experts who were invited guests waited more than 6 hours to testify at the hearing.

The national experts who testified included two leaders of juvenile justice systems that have eliminated punitive room confinement, Clinton Lacey, Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services in Washington DC, and Peter Forbes, the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. Other expert testimony came from Marc Schindler, Executive Director of the Justice Policy Institute, and Dr. Angela Sedeño, Executive Director of the Kedzie Center in Chicago. Dr. Sedeño is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Prior to joining The Kedzie Center, she served as Family Services Program Director at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center.

Director Clinton Lacey of Washington DC and Commissioner Peter Forbes of Massachusetts have each successfully eliminated the use of punitive room confinement in their youth justice systems. They each presented narratives and data on their approach to eliminating punitive room confinement from the systems they run, detailing

the new policies that have replaced the use of punitive room confinement. They explained the methodology that they have developed to train staff to become more relational and less punitive in their dealings with the detained youth. Dr. Sedeño detailed the harmful impacts of isolation on youth development. Each of these experts has offered to provide further consultation or support to the JTDC leadership as they consider strategies for eliminating punitive room confinement.

JTDC Advisory Board Activity in 2021

In 2021, The Advisory Board decided to continue its work on eliminating punitive room confinement while expanding its focus to explore re-entry support for youth in detention. The Advisory Board has observed a marked decrease in the existence of arts, sports, and other programs available to youth in detention during the pandemic. In addition, the agencies charged with planning for post-release care of detained youth are under-resourced and often work in silos rather than in a collaborative manner.

The Advisory Board interviewed staff and directors from County and City agencies about their re-entry programs and how those programs linked to and supported JTDC residents during and after detention. While several agencies offer new programs and methodologies to address re-entry, the Advisory Board noted many challenges to collaboration. Among them, few agencies focused on re-entry support are sharing data or resources. Advisory Board members also noted that there seems to be a large percentage of residents at the JTDC who do not have access to these programs prior to release and that some of the centers (units where youth are housed) within the JTDC exclude youth with lower behavior levels, thereby making programs reward based as opposed to rehabilitative.

In a meeting with Superintendent Dixon, the Advisory Board learned that the JTDC views its overall mission as one focused on safety and security, measured by decreases in violence at the JTDC, and therefore does not include a focus on re-entry.

The Advisory Board interviewed youth about programs they attended at the JTDC and about continued programming available in their neighborhoods. A meeting with the Superintendent included a discussion of arts, athletics, reentry, and other available programs in the JTDC. The Superintendent noted that not all the programs that are on the JTDC roster are rooted in the communities where the youth in JTDC live. This means that many youth in detention may not have access to programs that could provide robust reentry support when they are detained or released. The Superintendent also noted the difficulty of finding mentors for the youth. The Advisory Board also heard from stakeholders that there is a tremendous lack of re-entry resources in the community for older youth/young adults as well as youth that may be deemed as high risk due to a history of convictions for violent crimes or assessment for risks/needs. It is essential that Cook County invest in community organizations willing to serve these populations of youth.

The Advisory Board would like to support the JTDC leadership in expanding programming and ensuring that each of the JTDC centers and all youth in detention have access to high-quality arts, cultural, and athletic programs that we know positively impact youth's mental, emotional, and physical health.

The Advisory Board also hopes to see an expansion of reentry resources for youth, in collaboration with JTDC leadership.

JTDC Advisory Board Activity in 2022

In 2022, The Advisory Board worked primarily on three issues, listed below.

1. Continued Work on the Elimination of Punitive Room Confinement

In May of 2022, the Advisory Board was pleased to hear that Chief Judge Timothy Evans had reconvened a Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC) to write a report on the use of punitive room confinement at the JTDC with research assistance provided by Chapin Hall.

Because the BRC report directly responded to the Advisory Board's 2019 data and information requests, the Advisory Board decided that their 2022 public hearing should include the relevant data from this report. The Advisory Board invited its chief author, Dr. Eugene Griffin, Chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee, to speak about the report's recommendations at the hearing.

The [BRC report](#) raised serious concerns about the JTDC's over-reliance on room confinement as a means of isolation. Committee Chair Dr. Eugene Griffen described the conditions in [an op-ed](#) in the *Sun-Times*;

"The teenagers in the JTDC spend most of the day, every day, locked alone in small cells with only a mattress and toilet. They have no pen or pencil, no chair or desk, and not even a pillow. The JTDC locks up youth 12 hours a day for "sleep time." During the other 12 hours, youth can be locked up for additional reasons, including administrative convenience. And the JTDC does not report to anyone the total number of hours youth spend in their cells. Members of our committee noted that even short-term use of isolation can cause serious harm to youth, especially those already struggling with mental health issues."

Following the public release of the BRC report, on May 16, 2022, Chief Judge Evans [issued a press release](#) announcing reforms that would address the lengthy room stays impacting youth in detention, and indicated an intention to create culturally relevant programming for detained youth. The Chief Judge then created an implementation

committee headed by Dr. Bryan Samuels, Executive Director of Chapin Hall, a nationally prominent research center at the University of Chicago. The implementation committee, which would spearhead the changes the Chief Judge wanted to see at the JTDC, selected 5 of the 50 recommendations from the BRC report as their focus.

At the Advisory Board Hearing on November 10, 2022, Dr. Samuels presented the work expected to be done by Chapin Hall.

2. Low Rates of Vaccination Among Detained Youth

In a special meeting with JTDC leadership on June 24, 2022, the Advisory Board requested the latest numbers on COVID and vaccinations. Dr. Kenneth Soyemi, Medical Director of Cermak Health Services, provided a detailed report on COVID rates among the youth population along with vaccination rates. The slides showed that fewer than 11% of youth in detention at that time were vaccinated for COVID. When the Advisory Board raised questions about this, the JTDC staff discussed the challenges of obtaining parental or guardian consent. While this is understandably challenging, this low rate of vaccination presents a serious threat to public health and to the health and safety of youth in detention. The Advisory Board requested progress toward a much higher rate of vaccination among detained youth and that JTDC leadership create a set of benchmarks, goals, and plans for increasing this number.

3. The Need for Expanded Reentry Supports for Detained Youth

At the November hearing, the JTDC Advisory Board presented a set of findings from their inquiry into reentry support in Cook County, as well as a set of recommendations to address this lack of services. This report is summarized in the following section.

A CALL TO ACTION: CREATING COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH REENTRY SUPPORT IN COOK COUNTY

THE 2021 ADVISORY BOARD REPORT & 2022 HEARING

Each year with an average daily population of 221, hundreds of young people exit the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center. These youth most often return to neighborhoods with few supportive programs, and high crime rates, and to public schools that may not have the resources necessary to support them. Lacking the skills and resources to navigate the world when they are released, many of these youth never return to public school. They often face unemployment, housing instability, and homelessness upon release.

Holistic plans are rarely in place to support youth as they exit detention and reintegrate back into their family, school, and community. The Advisory Board met with several of the agencies and organizations that do work on re-entry support for youth in detention, including the following:

- Brian Conant, Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health Director, Cook County Health and Hospitals
- Lisa Hampton, Director of Prevention and Intervention, City of Chicago Department of Family Support & Services
- Daveed Moscovitz, Juvenile Justice Manager, Chicago Public Schools
- Jessica Gingold, Equip for Equality, Staff Attorney, Special Education
- Rondell and Randy, 5-year participants at Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation testified on the importance of having community support and programs including Restorative Justice Circles
- Jamell Dorrough, a former resident of JTDC and Storycatchers Theatre participant from the 1990s, now a Director of a 500 Seat Call Center for Fortune 500 Companies in California, testified about his experience in immersive programming at the Detention Center and the importance of consistent mentorship upon release.

The work of each of these agencies is essential but needs to expand to meet the

significant needs of youth emerging from detention. These agencies must be resourced to collaborate across systems to provide wrap-around care for youth leaving detention. Most are unable to share personal data or information about detained youth for legal reasons. Young people would benefit from a comprehensive plan for returning to school, stable housing, and other resources they may need to regain stability. The Detention Center provides youth with a pamphlet of existing programs but no other connection to accessing these programs upon release.

If Cook County leadership wants to reduce levels of youth detention and crime, it must establish a comprehensive and cross-systems collaborative of re-entry services to connect youth with meaningful opportunities for self-sufficiency and community integration. This collaboration should involve cooperation between existing County agencies, local stakeholder groups, and juvenile justice reform advocates. Members of the JTDC Advisory Board offered a briefing at the 2022 hearing to raise awareness and encourage investment of resources to expand youth re-entry services across Cook County.

Best Practices in Youth Reentry

The juvenile justice field has identified best practices in reentry services and programs. These include planning for release from the moment a youth is detained, as well as access to services, and actively involved case management that extends at least one year beyond release from secure placement. Research indicates that youth reentry services should be located in the community where returning youth live and that these services must be individualized to accommodate the youth's developmental and psychosocial challenges. Reentry programs should focus on reconnecting youth with school, with an emphasis on re-enrollment, attendance, and graduation. Reentry programs should focus on connecting youth with permanent guardianship arrangements, and community

mentorship to combat instability. These programs should include access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as workforce preparation programs. Youth reentry programs should further include housing resources and supports for youth. These services should start the moment a young person is detained so that holistic plans can be put into place pre-release. It is essential that Cook County invest in community organizations willing to serve these populations of youth.

Recommendations

Based on meetings with JTDC Superintendent Dixon and JTDC staff, and a review of the best practices in the field of youth re-entry, the JTDC Advisory Board proposes the following **4 recommendations** to make existing re-entry programs more structured, available, and equitable:

1. Cook County leaders should support the creation of a system of reentry support for youth emerging from detention that is collaborative, coordinating care across systems.
2. JTDC leadership should establish a system for increased data sharing among agencies and programs that serve detained and released youth.
3. Cook County leadership should identify and work to fill gaps in services (program deserts, understaffed and unrepresentative services particularly in areas where the JTDC residents reside).
4. Cook County leadership should help to identify funding and support for reentry organizations and other youth-serving agencies that are well-positioned to provide developmentally appropriate services, and that are located in the communities where the detained youth reside.

The JTDC Advisory Board looks forward to working with the Cook County Board of Commissioners, together with the Office of the Chief Judge, Leadership of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, and other stakeholders, to strengthen reentry supports to ensure integration of vulnerable youth as they transition from the JTDC to their neighborhoods, homes, and communities.

Conclusion

In 2023, the JTDC Advisory Board will retain several longstanding priorities:

1. The Advisory Board will remain focused on the elimination of the use of punitive room confinement in the JTDC.
2. The Advisory Board will also maintain its focus on the integration of effective community-based programs into the schedule of every Center at the JTDC.
3. The Advisory Board will continue its work to expand reentry support for youth in the JTDC.
4. The Advisory Board will continue to focus on improving vaccination rates and other COVID mitigation efforts in the JTDC.

The Advisory Board is committed to supporting the JTDC in eliminating practices that are harmful to youth in detention, and to seeing those practices replaced with programs that are evidence-based and rooted in the principles of positive youth development. The Advisory Board believes that convening a network of youth-serving agencies with the aim of promoting a collaborative approach to reentry support across Cook County would greatly benefit detained youth. We seek the support of the Cook County Board as we approach these challenging issues.