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Eroded Progress

Recent Spike in Youth Confinement Erases Past Year's Decline

Executive Summary

A significant increase in confinement of delinquent youth this spring erased an entire year of serving more youth in the community. Warehousing lower risk youth with other, more delinquent youth poses significant risks to public safety.

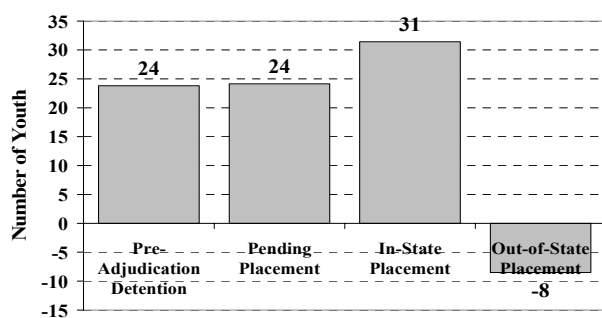
Population Spike

Maryland Juvenile Services Secretary Donald DeVore has aimed to treat more delinquent youth in their homes and communities through evidence-based programs like Multi-Systemic and Functional Family Therapies.¹ Consistent with the goal, there was a modest but sustained drop in youth confinement between January 2007 and March 2008, from 1,519 to 1,374. However, a population spike in April and May 2008 erased almost all of this progress. The June 2008 confinement level was almost the same as June 2007 (see page 2).²

Discussion

The population surge occurred in pre-adjudication detention, pending placement and in-state placement, but not in out-of-state placements.

Change Between April and June 2008



¹ Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, *FY 2008 Strategic Plan* (July 2007); Annie E. Casey Foundation, *A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform* (June 2008).

² Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, Daily Population Reports. The residential population includes youth held in shelters and detention centers prior to court proceedings and while pending placement and youth who are placed in group homes, drug treatment, residential treatment centers and secure facilities after disposition.

The increase pre-dates and is unrelated to the “warrant sweeps” in Baltimore City that occurred from late May to early July.³ The spike also began prior to the use of a new detention screening instrument at the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center in late April.⁴

Implications

The critical issue is what interventions are most likely to result in rehabilitation and improved public safety. Confinement of youth can worsen public safety if it is unnecessary or poorly structured. Often, youth in detention centers are receiving no services and are interacting with higher-risk youth. Thus, confinement of youth who are not high risk can result in more youth who are more prone to delinquent acts after release. Meanwhile, Maryland’s residential programs are not yet offering effective rehabilitative services and are producing high rates of re-arrests. The lack of appropriate interventions is creating a cycle of delinquency.⁵

Recommendations

Expand Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy as rapidly as possible. These community-based practices have been shown to reduce rearrests and out-of-home placements, improve family functioning and decrease mental health problems for delinquent youth. Savings from these services can be invested in more services and expanded opportunities for youth.

Implement the essential elements of an effective rehabilitative model for high-risk youth who require residential placement. The Missouri Division of Youth Services has mastered the formula for serving high-risk youth in residential placements and preventing future delinquency.

³ See Julie Bykowicz, *The Baltimore Sun*, “Police Hunt for ‘Baddest’ Kids” (July 10, 2008).

⁴ ACY asked the Department of Juvenile Services to explain the increase but received no response.

⁵ See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Ending Maryland’s Cycle of Delinquency* (Feb. 2008).



Juvenile Residential Population

