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South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF
JUVENILE JUSTICE
Sylvia Murray, Director

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RE: DJJ Improvement Plan

Overview

The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is responsible for the care and rehabilitation of South Carolina children who are incarcerated, on probation or parole, or in community placement for a criminal or status offense.

DJJ's goal is to protect the public and reclaim juveniles through prevention, community programs, education, and rehabilitative services in the least restrictive environment appropriate for that juvenile.

DJJ has approximately 1,400 employees working in five secure evaluation, detention, and incarceration facilities and 43 county offices throughout the state. DJJ also works with private providers and camps who serve juveniles referred for treatment by the family court system. DJJ serves 109 juveniles, primarily committed to DJJ for serious offenses, at its long term facility on Broad River Road in Columbia.

In light of several serious security incidents at DJJ's Broad River Road Complex, the agency has begun a review of its discipline, staff training, and security procedures aimed at improving all of the agency's secure facilities. With these recent security compromises, it has become clear that significant changes need to be made to the way DJJ administers juvenile discipline, staffing and staff training, the physical security of its facilities, and its treatment, support, and cooperation efforts. DJJ has identified significant areas of concern and corresponding changes:

Key Areas of Concern

- 1. Juvenile Discipline**
- 2. Physical Security**
- 3. Staffing and Staff Training**
- 4. Improved Treatment, Support, Cooperation, and Communication**



Strategy 1 – Juvenile Discipline

Juvenile Progressive Discipline System

Juveniles at DJJ's secure facilities who engage in misconduct, meaning they violate the rules or regulations of the facility, will be subject to an enhanced and more robust Juvenile Progressive Discipline system. Based on feedback from the agency's correctional staff and others, DJJ will be introducing a new system of juvenile discipline in our secure facilities. This system will include greater accountability for juveniles who engage in behaviors such as disrespecting, disobeying, threatening, or assaulting staff. The goal of this new system is to ensure that juveniles understand that if they intend to threaten or harm staff or their fellow juveniles, there will be swift and certain consequences for their actions. These consequences will include everything from increased sanctions on juveniles who violate the rules at facilities to the prosecution of juveniles who engage in aggressive or violent criminal conduct (including adult charges and restitution to taxpayers for damage if warranted).

The new juvenile discipline policy will include levels of juvenile misbehavior that increase in seriousness. These changes are designed to empower unit and shift supervisory staff with the authority to address and sanction immediately the least serious incidents of misbehavior by youth, to include the use of Disciplinary Conferences, when appropriate. DJJ's reliance on conferencing and victim-oriented resolution to respond to all types of juvenile misconduct – from minor to serious incidents – has proven to be inadequate in responding to the more serious misconduct. In recognition of this, the agency is reinstating a Disciplinary Hearing Process to address serious juvenile misconduct. This Disciplinary Hearing Process will adhere to the basic concepts of due process, and the rules violation will be adjudicated by a disciplinary hearing officer who, among other options for sanctions/responses, will be able to relocate a juvenile to a more restrictive housing unit, if necessary.

Phase/Level System

DJJ is also implementing a new Reclaim Phase System (replacing the current behavioral points/level system) for recognizing and rewarding positive behavior of youth. The new juvenile disciplinary process will be tied into this Phase System so that staff can be more consistent both with consequences for negative and disruptive behavior as well as with rewards and incentives for positive behavior.

Enhanced Secure Housing

In order to reduce incidents of juvenile misconduct at the Broad River Road Campus, DJJ is strategically evaluating the current population and identifying youth for appropriate housing to focus more on their needed level of security and treatment. The agency has taken steps to create additional levels of secure housing for committed juveniles based on juvenile risk and behavior. These additional levels of housing will create a continuum to respond to the conduct and treatment needs of youth. In these new units, the staff to juvenile ratios will decrease as the level of security/treatment in the unit increases. While maintaining a Crisis Management Unit for the temporary restrictive housing of youth who are unable to be maintained in their assigned living unit, DJJ will establish a new living unit known as the Intensive Treatment Unit



that will house our most physically aggressive and volatile youth. The next level of security/treatment living unit will be the Resocialization Unit that will house youth who have shown a pattern of aggression. Next, a Reorientation Unit will house youth who are not adhering to the facility basic rules (though not violent or aggressive in their misbehavior). The agency will continue to have General Population units that will house youth assigned to BRRC who are demonstrating general compliance with expected standards of conduct as well as continue the Honors Unit which was established in September 2015 to house youth who have demonstrated consistent positive behavior. Enhanced rehabilitation/treatment staffing and programming will also exist in all restrictive housing units.

Teams from the Department of Administration and the Department of Corrections are on-site to assist in expediting these security enhancements. DJJ should be able to make all these improvements within the existing budget. In addition, the Director has requested a security audit by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and will use the guidance from NIC to develop DJJ's own ongoing security audit system.

Rapid Response Team

DJJ is implementing an internal rapid response team that will be responsible to respond to emergency situations that threaten the safety or security of the Broad River Road Complex. This team will be developed using existing staff, and a new policy related to that team's functions is being finalized. The team will be made up of 15 current employees who will receive "special assignment pay" for their time and commitment (similar to how SCDC staff are paid for a similar function). The costs associated with this team will include the purchase of protective uniforms, protective gear and equipment, and the special assignment pay. The team will be funded with existing agency resources and will not be an additional cost to the state.

Enhanced Juvenile Control Measures

Juvenile Specialists and Juvenile Correctional Officers work with juveniles day-to-day and are responsible for security functions, to include addressing and redirecting less serious juvenile misconduct. For those officers, DJJ is training officers on techniques to deescalate conflicts and safely subdue unruly juveniles. DJJ also employs certified Class I Law Enforcement Officers as part of the agency's police department to assist correctional officers when the behavior becomes more serious and all other techniques have failed to restore order. In order to address the most serious incidents of juvenile misconduct that threaten the physical safety of staff or other youth, the Department is partnering with the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy to train DJJ's certified Class I Law Enforcement Officers in the use of OC Spray (aka "pepper spray"). These Police Officers will be trained and certified in the use of OC Spray to manage serious, aggressive juvenile behavior to protect juveniles and staff.



Strategy 2 – Physical Security

Recent incidents have demonstrated the need for DJJ to reassess current security protocols and infrastructure at the Broad River Road campus. Having surveyed our facilities for potential vulnerabilities and based on feedback from security staff, DJJ will be making several improvements to the physical security of its secure facilities to reduce incidents and increase safety for youth and staff. These changes include:

- Installation of heavy Lexan break-resistant glass in dorms and other facilities (already installed in at least one dorm)
- Installation of tamper-resistant plumbing fixtures, electrical fixtures, and furniture in dorms and other facilities (already installed in at least one dorm)
- Installation of improved physical security for dorm courtyards, to include razor-wire fencing that has already been installed
- Additional fencing around DJJ dorms
- Improved physical security of cells in the Crisis Management Unit and locking measures
- Improved hardware protection and physical security in control rooms

Strategy 3 – Staffing and Staff Training

Similar to other correctional and law enforcement agencies, the Department of Juvenile Justice experiences high turnover with correctional staff, along with recruiting difficulties due to salary, work environment, and other factors. Recruiting, retaining, training, compensating and protecting staff are key factors that will contribute to the organization's improvements. The agency is also taking measures to improve security supervision and leadership, with greater onsite supervisor presence in DJJ secure facilities.

Recruitment and Hiring

To improve the recruiting process for correctional staff, DJJ intends to use various tools to attract candidates such as radio ads, attending more job fairs, use of job search websites when possible, reaching out to job placement organizations, and continuing the extended job announcement process on the state's recruiting website. An interview team will be established to focus on continuous interviewing and hiring as long as needed. The agency will review the hiring process to eliminate unnecessary administrative steps to expedite hiring staff while still complying with certain mandatory background checks for a correctional establishment.

The agency also recognizes the need to hire experienced individuals with correctional backgrounds, particularly in juvenile corrections. There are several candidate pools to recruit experienced staff that include former DJJ staff, SC Department of Corrections retirees, and military retirees. An individual will be assigned to focus on this recruiting strategy. Also, consideration is being given to employing part-time evening correctional staff to cover the most vulnerable hours between 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm.

Compensation

Several compensation strategies are being implemented to recruit and retain correctional staff, and include:

- Expanded use of overtime is being granted to ensure full staffing levels at all times
- Implementing shift differential payments for designated shifts. It is anticipated that this change will occur within the next 3 to 6 weeks after a review of working shifts is completed and final plans made.
- Proceeding with the career paths that focus on a managerial track and an officer track. The anticipated date for implementing these career paths are approximately within the next 6 to 8 weeks due to ensuring training that will allow advancement is available.
- Utilizing the bonus program to provide recognition and incentives to deserving staff.



Security Training of Juvenile Correctional Staff and Non-Security Staff

Another one of the strategies that the Department has put into place to help both address and reduce the number of incidents at BRRC is the expansion and improvement of its trainings for Juvenile Correctional Officers and Juvenile Specialists. DJJ has formally re-established its training relationship with the SC Criminal Justice Academy. The SC Criminal Justice Academy, which is governed by the 11 member South Carolina Law Enforcement Training Council, unanimously voted to support SCDJJ and officially put DJJ's training under the governing support of the academy. This means that all security trainings offered by the agency will not only be internally approved, but also will adhere to the Academy's standards and guidelines. The 4-week Basic Training for new Juvenile Correctional Officers and Juvenile Specialists is being revised to include updated training curriculum content with inclusion of not only policy and operating standards, but also hands-on applications and exercises. As mentioned above, the officer trainings now also will include more interpersonal skills sessions as well as sessions on verbal de-escalation. In addition, starting in March 2016, the agency began instituting a two-hour security awareness training segment in the New Employee Orientation program and will also offer this training on a regular, on-going basis for current non-security personnel.

Police Chief and Gang Intervention Specialist

DJJ has posted a Police Chief position, which has been vacant for two years, to manage the on-campus police force and public safety functions. Representatives from other law enforcement agencies are assisting with the interview process to make final candidate recommendations. In the meantime, SLED has worked with DJJ and assigned an individual to serve as the Interim Police Chief. In addition, in order to address gang activity in DJJ's secure facilities, a Gang Intervention Specialist position, which has been vacant for one year, is being hired.

Supervisory Rank and Recognition

DJJ will return to a uniform standard that easily distinguishes supervisors from non-supervisory staff. This change is important so that juveniles, staff, non-security staff and others are able to readily identifiable supervisors and know "who is in charge." Currently, supervisors and employees wear the same uniforms. During critical situations, it is difficult to identify who is in command. The supervisory uniforms are referred to as the "white shirts." This changeover is currently being implemented.

Contraband Detection and Searches

DJJ has instituted new search procedures at the BRRC security gate in an effort to detect and eliminate the introduction of contraband items (particularly lighters/matches and cigarettes) into the secure facility. Also, the agency's search policy recently was revised to include retraining all security staff on the proper procedures on how to conduct pat-down searches and strip searches. Metal detectors were also ordered for installation at additional entrance/exit doors at Birchwood High School.

Strategy 4 – Improved Treatment and Collaboration

Increased Access of Juveniles to Treatment Personnel

There is a social worker assigned to Birchwood High School at the Broad River Road Campus who is available to staff for assistance in de-escalating juveniles during the school day, and the Clinician-on-Call is also on call to the school BMI classrooms (similar to in-school suspension) when a youth is in need of de-escalation and/or clinical intervention. For those youth on behavior contracts, it is written into the contract that the juvenile may ask to see the social worker or psychologist during the day, if needed. Also, DJJ developed a plan to integrate time for clinical services into the school day. This process was implemented in January 2016 and has yielded positive results to date. In addition, effective March 1, 2016, clinical staff are on campus at the long-term institution for extended evening hours in order to provide assistance to security staff with de-escalation of juvenile behaviors and crisis intervention.

Enhanced Collaboration with Child-Serving Agencies

In conjunction with DJJ's efforts to establish housing units that are specific and responsive to the individualized security and treatment needs of our committed youth, DJJ currently is exploring options to relocate our Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) and Seriously Mentally Retarded (SMR) juveniles from DJJ long-term facilities to treatment environments conducive to their specialized needs. In addition, DJJ has partnered with DMH Director John McGill and Protection and Advocacy Director Gloria Prevost to institute measures to relocate SMI youth committed to DJJ to more appropriate mental health facilities and to formulate recommendations on a more extensive service array for these SMI youth to include appropriate community-based and residential services. DJJ Director Murray and DMH Director McGill have met and formulated a multi-tiered plan to improve services for the SMI youth in DJJ secure facilities. In addition, a meeting is scheduled next week with the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services to discuss further this plan.

Enhanced Treatment Response to Aggressive Misconduct

In order to address the underlying causes of juvenile misbehavior, DJJ will train all clinical staff at the Broad River Road Complex in Aggression Replacement Training (ART). The training will be held March 14-15th. ART is an Evidenced Based Program certified as a Model Program by OJJDP and recognized by the National Gang Center as an effective gang prevention and intervention program. ART has achieved excellent results with juvenile justice agencies across the country in reducing aggressive behavior, improving staff and juvenile safety in facilities, and reducing juvenile recidivism. ART is based on three coordinated and integrated components, those being social skills training (helps youth replace antisocial behaviors with positive improvements – “what to do”), anger control (helps youth respond to anger in a nonaggressive manner and rethink anger-provoking situations – “what not to do”), and moral reasoning (helps raise youth levels of fairness, justice, and concern for the needs and rights of others).

