

Study Resolution

Review of the Juvenile Justice System

Authorized by the Commission on November 16, 2020

WHEREAS, the mission of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is to protect the public by helping court-involved youth become productive citizens; and

WHEREAS, on any given day, DJJ has between 4,000 and 5,000 youth under some type of supervision, with about 90% of youth being supervised through diversion, probation, or parole; and

WHEREAS, DJJ operates a juvenile correctional facility and provides a continuum of community-based services to youth in the juvenile justice system through partnerships with localities, non-profits, and private entities; and

WHEREAS, the proportion of minority youth in the juvenile justice system is greater than in the general population, and the proportion of youth in the system from certain regions is greater than the proportion of youth in those regions generally; and

WHEREAS, the 2016 General Assembly authorized reform of the juvenile justice system, including allowing DJJ to reinvest operational savings from the recent closures of juvenile correctional centers into treatment, education, and alternative placement options and planning for two new juvenile correctional centers; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission that staff be directed to review Virginia's juvenile justice system, including the Department of Juvenile Justice.

In conducting its study, staff shall (i) assess Virginia's juvenile justice system process, including intake, petition, detention, and adjudication and disposition; (ii) determine whether there are racial or regional disparities in the treatment of youth in the juvenile justice system; (iii) determine whether there are disproportionate impacts on youth with cognitive or behavioral health disabilities in the juvenile justice system; (iv) assess the status of DJJ's recent reforms and whether the reforms have improved outcomes for youth, including rearrest rates, recidivism, and educational outcomes; (v) assess whether DJJ facilities are adequately staffed and whether staff are sufficiently trained; (vi) evaluate future facility needs, including considerations regarding the placement of committed youth relative to their primary residence and the appropriate size of future facilities; (vii) evaluate the effectiveness of educational and training services provided at juvenile correctional centers and juvenile detention centers and whether funding levels appropriately reflect the population of youth in these facilities; (viii) determine whether DJJ adequately oversees community-based services provided to youth and if sufficient community-based services are available throughout the state; and (ix) assess the extent to which DJJ ensures that appropriate services are consistently provided and best practices are followed at juvenile detention centers throughout the state.

JLARC shall make recommendations as necessary and review other issues as warranted.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, shall provide assistance, information, and data to JLARC for this study, upon request. JLARC staff shall have access to all information in the possession of agencies pursuant to § 30-59 and § 30-69 of the Code of Virginia. No provision of the Code of Virginia shall be interpreted as limiting or restricting the access of JLARC staff to information pursuant to its statutory authority.