



October 2020

## TRANSFORMATION POSITION PAPER

### Background

The juvenile justice field has been transforming from a system of an adult correctional model to one focused on treatment and rehabilitation of youth since its inception in 1899 and more rigorously the last two decades. The expanding research and knowledge have strengthened the transformation and reform efforts to create more informed, fair, just, and effective systems. However, much more must be done to improve the overall conditions, quality of life, and long-term outcomes for juvenile justice involved youth.

Systemic changes have dramatically reduced the number of young people in secure residential care. In 2007, 86,814 youth were incarcerated in short-term or long-term residential facilities across the United States, that number decreased to 43,580 in 2017<sup>1</sup>. More youth are being served in the communities which results in a greater concentration of higher need and higher risk youth in residential facilities. The young people entering the juvenile justice system and into secure residential treatment facilities have arrived with multiple mental health challenges including varying levels of abuse, neglect and trauma, substance use disorders, are survivors of sexual abuse and oftentimes subsequently harmful sexual behaviors, as well as intellectual and developmental disabilities. Deep-end, secure juvenile justice system facilities have become the last resort for many youths who have been unable to access services in a community-based setting to meet their needs. This has resulted in reducing the overall number of youth being committed to the “deep-end correctional” style facilities with an increased focus on “right kids, right place, right services, for the right length of time.”

The Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators (CJJA) formerly the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators has understood the primary responsibility of youth confinement facilities is safety, specifically the safety of youth, staff, and visitors. CJJA began by developing conditions of confinement standards with the assistance of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that became known as Performance-based Standards (PbS). PbS combines research, best practices, and field experience to offer a data-driven continuous improvement process. CJJA and PbS set expectations for conditions of confinement, quality of life, staff-youth relationships, healthy cultures, and effective services through a comprehensive outcome measure and data collection and reporting process. Facilities are assigned PbS coaches who build relationships with onsite staff to help monitor and assess data collection and then to create Facility Improvement Plans (FIPs) to continually work towards improved conditions, reduced incidents of violence, reduced isolation and

### Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators

Suite 350 Granite St.  
Suite 1203  
Braintree, MA 02184  
www.CJJA.net

#### Mission

To connect, develop and strengthen youth corrections leaders to maximize their capacities to implement and sustain reforms in their systems that will improve outcomes for youth, families and communities.

#### Vision

“We believe every youth should leave a correctional program in a better place than when he or she came in.”

#### Core Values

- Continuous Learning
- Collaboration
- Rehabilitation
- Parental Engagement
- Supportive Communities
- Diversity

#### Executive Director

Michael P. Dempsey

#### Elected Officers

##### President

Steve Lafreniere, Alabama

##### Vice President

Peter Forbes, Massachusetts

##### Treasurer

Chris Blessinger, Indiana

##### Secretary

Valerie Boykin, Virginia

<sup>1</sup> Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., & Puzanchera, C. (2019) “Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement.” Available: <https://www.ojjdp/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>

improved practices. CJJA continues to challenge the field to reach higher standards and to implement developmentally appropriate approaches to achieve positive outcomes for youth, families, and staff. This challenge to a more informed, fair, just, equitable, and effective juvenile justice system has been developed through multi-site philanthropic partnerships with CJJA including the MacArthur Foundation’s Models for Change Initiative, the Juvenile Justice Leadership Network through the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), PbS, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and the Pew Charitable Trusts, Public Safety Performance Project. The system is also supported by advocacy organizations, including the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the Youth Law Center, Juvenile Law Center, and many others that raise national awareness of juvenile justice issues and offer strategies for prevention and system improvement. High standards and broad intervention advances include movement away from methods that compromise relationships between staff and youth, a necessary feature of rehabilitative environments and safe facilities.

These agencies, foundations, and networks have researched and identified principles to transform the juvenile justice system. This has resulted in aligning principles of adolescent development with guidelines that are important for an effective juvenile justice system. Two examples of critical work in this area includes: the Juvenile Justice Leadership Network through the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) outlined operating principles in *A Roadmap to an Ideal Juvenile Justice System*<sup>2</sup> and the Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed *Eight Principles to Transform Care*<sup>3</sup>, which CJJA is incorporating into their body of work. Another major initiative is the Youth in Custody Practice Model (YICPM) which was developed in partnership between CJJA and CJJR. The YICPM is a research-based initiative designed to improve services for youth in custody, from facility admission to community reentry.

CJJA understands and believes that the path to the successful transformation of secure and non-secure youth residential facilities lays within the transformation of the cultures, atmospheres, and environments of these facilities. This should include transforming the principles and purpose of these facilities. Much of that is reliant upon improving the wellbeing of staff and relationships with the youth and families of those entrusted to the care of the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, we recognize the importance and impact that staff have on the overall culture and atmosphere of these facilities. Hiring the right staff and providing them with the right training and skills to more effectively manage their work and responsibilities is of the highest importance, as is a continued focus on their development and wellbeing. We recognize that the wellbeing of staff also plays a critical role in conditions of confinement and incidents of violence within these facilities. How well staff build positive relationships with youth and their families, directly impacts how they respond to various behavioral incidents. This response either de-escalates the situation or plays a role in escalating the behavior and response which can then result in the use of physical, mechanical and even chemical restraint practices and then into the use of isolation and confinement.

## **Position Statement**

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<sup>2</sup> Decker, T. (2019) “A Roadmap to an Ideal Juvenile Justice System.” Juvenile Justice Leadership Network

<sup>3</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019) “Eight Principles of Care.” Available:

<https://www.aecf.org/resources/eight-principles-to-transform-care-for-young-people-in-the-justice-system/>

The Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators recognizes the importance of jurisdictions adopting principles to promote a developmentally oriented approach to keeping youth in their communities when possible, reducing formal legal involvement except when necessary to ensure accountability or community protection, and providing appropriate interventions and services needed to support prosocial development. CJJA strongly encourages jurisdictions adopt guidelines to implement the following principles in their jurisdictions:

- Staff development that starts with promoting wellness and life balance
- Leadership values that promote well-being of staff as the foundation of safety, healing relationships and change opportunities for youth
- Targeted mental health assessments and diagnostics to address root causes of behavioral difficulties and evaluate risk
- Youth and family centered approaches in assessment and treatment planning
- Safe, therapeutic and reparative environments
- Programming that is research-based, data-driven, and outcome-focused
- Approach that has a foundational and overarching positive behavior modification orientation
- Programming that is robust, diverse and purposeful
- Developmentally appropriate in approach
- Trauma informed and trauma responsive
- Gender and cultural awareness training utilized in addressing adolescent behaviors
- Staff development that results in positive and supportive relationships between youth and staff
- Staff training on strength-based and adolescent development informed techniques
- Fair and equitable treatment
- Utilizes a nationally recognized crisis prevention and intervention model and training
- Strong coordination and integration with communities
- System for continuous quality improvement

Transforming to an ideal system requires mindful consideration of purpose, practices for youth, families, staff, and the community. A holistic approach to developing a framework for improving practice throughout the continuum of care and services will strengthen positive outcomes for youth who enter the juvenile justice system.