



## **John Howard Association of Illinois**

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# **Staffing Levels in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice 2009**

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The purpose of this report is to provide information to legislative leaders and the general public on the level of employees currently on staff in the secure facilities operated by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. Their numbers have been steadily decreasing over the past three years and are on pace to reach a critical stage unless additional funds are made available, or the number of youth confined and facilities operated are reduced.

This report is based on the observations of teams of trained citizen volunteers who visited each of the eight secure facilities operated by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice since its inception in July 2006. Most of these visitors had previously visited these same institutions between 2001 and July 2006 when they were operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections-Youth Division. The visits include observation of conditions and interviews with staff and administration as well as residents. Each facility has been visited a minimum of one time per year, and in some instances far more frequently.

Funding for the John Howard Association of Illinois's ongoing review of the progress being made by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice was provided by the John D. and Catherine T. Mac Arthur Foundation through its Models for Change initiative.

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## **Staffing Levels in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice**

The overall number of authorized employees for the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (headcount) has been shrinking for the past three years. In state fiscal year 2006 the number was 1,258, for state fiscal year 2007 the number was 1,207, and for state fiscal year 2008 the number was 1,115. The workforce was also reduced by another 7%, representing those who are on some form of extended leave. (Some are on extended medical leaves while others are serving in the military.) This decrease occurred at a time when the number of institutions being operated and the number of youth being confined remained about the same.

### **Security Staff**

The conscious reduction in headcount and the number of employees on extended leave have resulted in a dramatic 11.4% decrease in the number of direct care staff. (Direct care staff includes all security staff from entry level to supervisor and shift commander.)

Unfortunately, these decreases were not spread uniformly between institutions. Union contracts prohibit the Department from moving employees from one facility to another, so the only way to balance population with employees is to move residents. This is not a practical solution as facilities vary dramatically in terms of level of security and programming available.

#### *Percentage decrease in direct care staff between 2006 and 2008*

Chicago	14%
Harrisburg	6%
Joliet	15%
Kewanee	7%
Murphysboro	4.2%
Pere Marquette	10%
St. Charles	19.8%
Warrenville	12.4%

The lack of security staff is partially due to the Department's inability to timely hire entry level staff for the new job classification of Juvenile Justice Specialist. Creation of this job category was mired in the endless bureaucracy that is state government for over two years. Once the hurdles were finally cleared, the Department moved quickly to begin hiring an initial class which entered the training academy in November 2008. Hiring of additional classes was suspended by the hiatus caused by the potential closing of Pontiac, the adult maximum security prison.

Whatever the reasons, the result of this critical lack of security staff is the same. Youth spend more time in their rooms because there is an insufficient number of staff to supervise activities or the youth's movement to activities. Fewer youth can work and make money if there are not enough people to supervise them. Staff, when present, are tired and out of sorts. Many call in sick, forcing others to work overtime, either by choice or because it is mandated. The pressure put on remaining staff exacerbates the problem. Visitors observed staff sleeping in facility parking lots, too tired to drive home after working double shifts.

### **Counselors**

Counselors are those individuals within the institution who function as the youth's advocate. They are initially assigned to residents and participate in formulating a treatment plan, serving as the connection to the parents, and doing all planning for release. National standards set a ratio of 1 counselor to 14 youth as the minimum acceptable case load. Counselors at all but Pere Marquette carry caseloads in excess of this standard, and one institution, IYC Joliet, has a ratio more than three times the standard.

Counselors are supervised by individuals known as Case Work Supervisors. Some years ago the Illinois Department of Corrections-Youth Division assigned one Case Work Supervisor to supervise every 5 Counselors. The current number of Case Work Supervisors is well below this ratio.

	# of Counselor	# of Case Work Supervisors	Ratio of Counselors to Youth
Chicago	2	0	1 : 30
Harrisburg	8	1	1 : 51
Joliet	5	1	1 : 54
Kewanee	11	2	1 : 25
Murphysboro	4	1	1 : 19
Pere Marquette	3	0	1 : 6
St. Charles	12	2	1 : 35
Warrenville	6	0	1 : 16

The extremely high ratios of counselors to youth at a significant number of DJJ's facilities may explain why so many youth are unsuccessful in making the transition to community life.

### **School Staff**

The number of authorized teachers has been the one area in which the Department has actually gained in the past few years. Despite that fact, there is still a lack of teachers sufficient to insure that all youth are enrolled in school full-time. This problem is

discussed in more detail in “Education in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice 2009.”

Only three of the eight DJJ schools currently have librarians. Where they exist, librarians can encourage a robust program of leisure reading, assist students with research and special projects and solicit donations of books and other library materials.

Few schools in DJJ currently have the school social workers, psychologists or diagnosticians that are indicated for the highly needy populations found here. As importantly, and discussed in greater detail below, few schools have any secretarial support. This forces teachers, and particularly principals, to do their own clerical work, robbing educators of time that could more appropriately be spent teaching, mentoring and supervising.

Clerical support at all levels of all institutions has been dramatically cut. Few schools have any secretaries despite the huge amount of paper work that needs to be done to secure school transcripts, arrange schedules, and insure that youth returning to community schools have the necessary paperwork. Such clerical tasks are critical for youth to successfully transition to the community.

#### **Other Staff with Resident Contact**

The lack of individuals in two other staff categories must be mentioned. The facility chaplain serves not just as a spiritual leader for residents in an institution, but also as an additional set of eyes and ears for youth who are experiencing difficulties. They can be an early warning system for an overworked mental health and counseling service. Perhaps most importantly, they typically recruit, coordinate and run an institution’s volunteer programs. At the close of 2008, only three of DJJ’s eight facilities had chaplains.

Leisure Time Activity Specialists (LTAS) are responsible for all recreation and leisure time of youth. Put to good use, participation in such activities can be used to reward good behavior, as well as to encourage pro-social attitudes like team work and tolerance for differences. Many of DJJ’s residents have had little opportunity to participate in the type of activities available to their more affluent peers. DJJ can offer these youth the chance to develop skills and aptitudes that will carry over to their community. At the close of 2008, there were only 10 LTAS employed by DJJ. In order to have a variety of team and individual activities for youth the Department could use a minimum of 30 LTAS.

#### **Other Staff**

There are a large number of other employees who work for DJJ in a variety of capacities from Cook to Painter to Business Manager, to Secretary. Often there will be only one or two people in each facility with one of these titles. The lack of those staff can cause dramatic change to a facility.

Our visitors witnessed one facility begin a real cosmetic facelift in lightening and brightening its walls. Staff and residents alike commented on how much better they felt with their new home. But then the facility's one painter was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome. The painting came to an abrupt halt and as time passed even the newly painted areas reverted to their former state.

The meals at Pere Marquette have historically been considered the best in the Department. In the summer of 2007, two of the cooks came down with separate debilitating medical conditions that forced them to take extended medical leaves. Security staff members were forced to prepare meals and food quality suffered, adversely impacting morale.

At many facilities, Superintendents and their Assistant Superintendents are doing their own clerical work. While this may result in some short-term savings it seems counter-productive to have those at the most senior levels of administration doing their own typing, copying and filing.

### **Conclusion**

For the last five years of its existence, the Youth Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections was stripped of many of the resources it had used to deliver care to the youth for whom it was responsible. This process was accomplished as the needs of the burgeoning adult population overwhelmed the Department of Corrections' budget and the will of the legislature to find additional resources.

The new Department of Juvenile Justice was created with a promise to be revenue neutral. However misguided that promise was when it was made, it is now abundantly clear that future progress can only be made with an additional commitment of funds. Such a commitment will repay itself many times over with a reduction in recidivism and the other human costs associated with incarceration.