

A Fiscal and Operational Review of the YDC/YFC System

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The officers of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee directed staff to conduct a detailed review of the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Youth Development Center (YDC) and Youth Forestry Camp (YFC) system. The YDC/YFC system is the state-owned service delivery mechanism for youth who have been adjudicated delinquent. Our study had six objectives, which covered these specific areas of interest: (1) utilization; (2) cost; (3) recidivism; (4) funding; (5) expenditures; and (6) employee complement. Our review primarily covered the period July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2018. Highlights of our report include:

- ❖ **There are distinct differences between Pennsylvania's juvenile and adult criminal court process.** Youth who commit crimes are not found guilty; instead, they are adjudicated delinquent by county juvenile court judges, who then decide how best to treat the juvenile offenders, including the appropriate placement.
- ❖ **The YDC/YFC system is comprised of three YDC facilities and two YFC facilities.** The YDC facilities are: Loysville, South Central, and North Central, and are secure residential facilities. The two YFC facilities are located on the grounds of state parks (Hickory Run and Trough Creek) and are non-secure, residential facilities. YDC/YFC facilities are not to be confused with juvenile detention facilities, which are typically operated by county government(s) and are for the temporary protection/placement of youth.
- ❖ **The YDC/YFC system is the *de facto* "provider of last resort."** There are hundreds of different juvenile rehabilitation providers (operated by for profit and not for profit entities). Counties contract with these providers to provide services for their adjudicated youth. These providers, however, can (and do) deny placements to their facilities. Conversely, the YDC/YFC system cannot deny placements—and as a result—it typically receives very complex (and costly) cases. For the youth in the YDC/YFC system as of April 2018, we found that 84% had a prior placement—and the average number of previous placements was 2.8
- ❖ **Utilization:** On average, about 775 youth are assigned to a YDC/YFC facility per year. Over the past four years, juvenile placements have increased by approximately 14%. In terms of days of care—or how long youth stay at a facility—there has been less growth, with only about 2% growth over the same period. This trend indicates that while more youth are being placed at a YDC/YFC facility, they are staying for shorter periods of time.
- ❖ **Cost:** Sending a youth to a YDC/YFC facility is expensive. We looked at per diem rates, or the daily rate to send a youth to a YDC/YFC facility. We found the rates are heavily influenced by a facility's days of care, and as such, there can be fluctuation between the estimated rate and the final certified rate. Counties pay for YDC/YFC services through a complicated reconciliation process, and the final rate is ultimately shared between the state (60%) and the county (40%). YDC/YFC per diem rates are

several hundreds of dollars per day, which can easily end up costing counties tens of thousands of dollars per juvenile.



- ❖ **Recidivism:** Slightly more than 50% of juveniles we reviewed committed additional crimes within two years of completing a YDC/YFC program. We reviewed two cohorts of YDC/YFC youth—and while this recidivism statistic is high—it needs to be viewed within the context of the youth's expected recidivism rate. Using this perspective, we found that approximately 97 percent of the youth were at moderate to very high risk to recidivate; therefore, because only slightly more than half actually did commit additional crimes—the actual recidivism rate is a better than expected outcome.
- ❖ **Funding and Expenditures:** The YDC/YFC system is funded predominately (85%) through the General Fund. With respect to expenditures, 66% of total expenditures are related to the direct care of juveniles. It costs about \$74 million to fund the YDC/YFC system per fiscal year. Expenditures are generally less than what is appropriated, with the balance being returned to the state's General Fund. However, because it is difficult to plan for the number of juveniles who will be placed in the system (and the needs of those youth) expenses can vary from year to year. Expenditures are coded to one of seven categories, of which Indirect Costs, have grown by 31% over the last three years.
- ❖ **Complement:** Owing to the difficult mix of youth in the YDC/YFC facilities, the system is labor intensive. As of April 28, 2017, 711 positions were assigned to the YDC/YFC system, with 624 positions filled, and 87 positions vacant. Of the filled positions, 46 were on work injury or other leave status. 72% of all positions were assigned to the direct support of juveniles.

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