

Policy Idea Statement: Keep the Department of Juvenile Justice as a Separate Agency; Restructure for Efficiency

The DJJ has experienced mission changes since its creation as a standalone agency in 1994. Despite that, and over time, the Legislature encouraged investments that have demonstrated results in safeguarding public safety, reducing crime, reducing victims and now more importantly, reducing future prison construction.

With the benefits of a privatized system that has brought unique, innovative and nationally recognized models, Florida has realized a consistent or continual decrease in arrests, referrals and commitments.

Now is an opportune time to streamline the agency and focus on reducing bureaucracy. Currently, the DJJ operates programming as well as provides oversight on privately operated programs. With current data supporting that privatized programs are more effective and cost efficient, it makes sense to streamline the agency by reducing the operating of state programs and refocusing the agency on providing oversight only.

3 Key Points

1. **Keep DJJ as a separate agency but restructure the agency to be smaller, more efficient and function as oversight only.**
 - This would immediately reduce costs and increase efficiencies and reduce duplication.
 - Systemic improvements continue, and we should first reduce the agency rather than immediately move towards consolidation based on the history.
 - Since the agency has experienced significant reductions over the last 6 years, eliminating the agency would not bring substantial cost savings.
 - We would be wise to build on the progress we have made these past 17 years.

2. **In the past, delinquent youth did not stand a chance in an agency with two, very different missions.**
 - The reason the DJJ was pulled out from within HRS was because resources were primarily directed to dependent and neglected children, the "deserving children."
 - Delinquent youth, the "undeserving youth," did not benefit from children's resources and who were served in detention centers, community-based halfway houses, or placed in one of the three, large, training schools.

3. **Florida's juvenile justice system is one of the most comprehensive in the country and is always improving.**
 - We have nationally recognized programs and services throughout the state which serve the needs of each local community.
 - Florida is a national leader in prevention, early intervention and diversion services which have helped to reduce the number of youth from penetrating the system.

Fiscal Impact: Cost savings will be significant if the DJJ is restructured to become an oversight agency.

Operational Impact: Closing state programs allows the agency to redirect resources within the agency and meet budget reductions.

Legislative: Statute change required to reorganize the DJJ per Chapter 985

PROS

- Reductions would line up with the new administration's plan to shrink down government to align with current revenue projections.
- Reducing DJJ state operations would make DJJ a smaller more efficient agency, focused solely on oversight.
- Cost savings could be redistributed within DJJ to prevention, intervention, civil citation, diversion, smaller community based residential, re-entry and transition services.

CONS: none