

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR YOUTH IN OCFS
YOUTH FACILITIES.

OPPOSE THE CLOSURES OF GREAT VALLEY
AND THE BROOKLYN, GLOVERSVILLE AND
MT. VERNON GROUP HOMES.



*The Executive Budget recommends the addition of
249 new positions, 173 of them in the Youth
Facilities Program, and the closure of Great Valley
non-secure youth facility and 3 group homes in
Brooklyn, Gloversville and Mt. Vernon.*

Fact: Youth enter OCFS facilities with multiple serious service needs that are not currently met by OCFS because of staffing shortages. OCFS currently cares for 75% of all residentially placed youth whose most serious offense was a crime against a person. 90% of youth entering OCFS facilities in 2005 had at least one special service need, and 67% had from two to eight such needs. Eighty percent of youth currently in OCFS custody have a substance abuse problem, 57% have a mental health problem, and 49% have a medical problem.

Fact: As service needs of OCFS youth have risen, OCFS staffing has decreased. There are 60 fewer teachers, 64 fewer youth counselors, 11 fewer nurses and 16 fewer vocational instructors in OCFS now than five years ago.

Fact: Teacher/student ratios in vocational classes are as high as 1:40 in some facilities, compared to 1:12 in public schools. Teacher/student ratios in academic classes doubled from 1:8 twelve years ago to 1:16 in 2001 and are likely worse today due to teacher vacancies.

Fact: Youth counselors' caseloads are often as high as 1:25 when field

research indicates they should be no larger than 1:10. This short-staffing is exacerbated by assigning counselors non-child related administrative duties.

Fact: While research shows that appropriate services promote more successful outcomes in the community, aftercare services have been neglected. There are fewer youth service teams now than in the mid 90s. Additionally, OCFS group homes are underutilized because OCFS has not spent funding appropriated by the Legislature to use them to their full capacity. OCFS Group Homes should be restructured, expanded and strengthened so that they are able to provide quality care in a community-based setting.

Fact: OCFS's current practice is to place youth in private voluntary child care agencies when they are transitioned out of more secure OCFS settings. Some 700 children are currently housed in voluntary agencies. However, 200 to 300 children are returned to OCFS facilities annually due to the inability of voluntary agency staff to provide the level of supervision necessary for these youth. OCFS should provide a seamless continuum of care from residential services through

supervised community care to independence.

Fact: The lack of adequate staffing and the need to accommodate youth returned to OCFS from voluntary agencies forces OCFS to release youth from their facilities before they are ready to re-enter the community. **The new positions in the OCFS proposed budget should be used to reduce teacher, vocational instructor, and counselor class size and caseloads in order to improve youths' ability to successfully return to their communities.**

Fact: In the current fiscal year \$1.9 million of the \$6.8 million appropriation for Evidence-based Community Initiatives has not been spent. Prior year appropriations were also not fully spent. Over funding for this program should be used for supporting state operated youth services.

Fact: Last year the Legislature enacted a twelve month notice provision for OCFS closures in order to ensure adequate time to make plans for affected residents, communities and employees. This requirement should be observed.

Support additional youth facilities staffing.

Oppose the OCFS facility closures and keep that current law that requires at least 12 months notice of a closure.

Require OCFS to develop a plan for youth facilities before considering any changes in facilities or reallocation of staff.



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