

DATE: 4/6/2020

RE: Intake at Youth Development Centers (YDCs) and Youth Forestry Camps (YFCs) to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic

Background

As the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) continues its relentless spread throughout the nation, multiple states, including California, Illinois, North Dakota, Alabama, Massachusetts, and Mississippi, have closed intake to their juvenile justice facilities. Other states, such as New York and Indiana, continue to receive juveniles. BJS has continued to explore every option available to keep youth, staff, and the communities where YDCs and YFCs are located, safe.

BJS Intake Units to Minimize Risk of COVID-19 Exposure

In order to maximize the protection of youth, staff, and the community from COVID-19, BJS will be creating two intake units for all YDCs/YFCs.

- BJS will create two 10-bed intake units for juveniles admitted to a YDC/YFC. One will be at the North Central Secure Treatment Unit's Girls Program, specific for girls. This is the only state operated girls' program in Pennsylvania. The other will be at the South Mountain Secure Treatment Unit, specific for boys. The South Mountain Secure Treatment unit is the only facility equipped with its own toilet and sink in each youth bedroom, which will exponentially decrease the potential risk of spread of the virus.
- Youth awaiting transfer to the YDC/YFC System will be admitted to the intake unit on the same day and remain in the unit for 14 days until they are cleared for entry into their designated program. Should any youth test positive for COVID – 19 during this 14-day period, that youth will be moved into isolation and the youth who are in the intake unit will re-start their 14 days in the unit to make sure that they do not develop symptoms of COVID-19.
- Screening for COVID-19 must occur and be documented prior to admission and include questions about exposure to COVID-19 and assessment for symptoms. Youth who are not documented as having been appropriately screened will not be accepted for admission. Youth who do not pass pre-admissions screening will not be accepted for admission until they are medically cleared for transport.
- While in the intake unit, youth will receive services and engage in the development of their Master Case Planning Conference. Youth will also have access to their temporary counselor, psychological services, medical services, physical activities, as well as other individualized recreational activities. Youth will be out of their rooms for periods of time throughout the day, but with enforced social distancing procedures. Normal daily behavior such as watching television will be accomplished by allowing youth to watch television from their bedroom. Family contact will be maintained through frequent opportunities to interact with their families through letters, phone calls, as well as video conferencing, skype and facetime as families are able to participate.
- The number of youth BJS will accept into the intake units will be based upon the number of YDC/YFC beds projected to be available 14 days after intake occurs, which will continue to be based on each facility program operating at 100% capacity.

- BJJS will transport all youth after 14 days without symptoms, without having come into contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID – 19, or without positive testing of COVID - 19, to their designated facilities and specific programs.

Implementation of intake units

- BJJS will create two separate intake units by attrition of current youth.
- Counties are asked to recommend release to the courts of all youth that can reasonably be released.
- BJJS will temporarily suspend intakes from all counties and relocate youth from the units designated for intake to other state-operated, appropriate programs.
- BJJS will take steps to protect youth who are at increased risk of serious illness due to pre-existing medical conditions by moving these youth into separate programs.

Limiting Youth Exposure by Limiting Residential Placement

- BJJS encourages all counties to scrutinize youth being considered for placement in a YDC/YFC, and to only place youth who pose such a significant risk to themselves and/or the community that no other option exists.
- BJJS again encourages counties to review all youth currently in placement and release all youth who can reasonably and safely be released.

DHS appreciates counties' collaboration in these efforts to allow for the safe and fast implementation of intake units in the YDC/YFC system.