

Improving Outcomes, Streamlining Services, Closing Facilities



By Gladys Carrión, Esq., Commissioner NYS Office of Children and Family Services

Over the last decade, county officials across New York State have demonstrated exemplary leadership in improving outcomes for troubled children who previously required detention services, PINS interventions, or out-of-home placements in residential facilities operated by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services.

Probation, social services, and family court judges in Delaware, Erie, NYC, Seneca, and Westchester, among others, aggressively moved to treat these children in evidence-based alternative-to-incarceration programs in their home communities that again and again have proven to be more effective and less costly in keeping children out of trouble.

The results are impressive. Between 2001 and 2007 there's been a 49 percent reduction in PINS petition filings, and since 2000, a 54 percent reduction in placements in OCFS residential centers.

Governor David A. Paterson and I applaud these successful efforts by counties and judges to improve outcomes for children, make communities safer, and to save taxpayers unnecessary costs.

Unfortunately, upon taking office, we discovered that the state had been slow to respond to this positive trend in county innovations, child development and community safety.

As a consequence of less children being sent to state-run juvenile facilities, taxpayers and local counties are still footing the bill for over 500 empty beds at OCFS residential centers at an annual cost of \$140,000 to \$200,000 each. Counties pay half the cost of each of these beds.

For Governor Paterson and I, this waste of taxpayer dollars is unacceptable at any time, especially when the state is suffering from a severe financial crisis.

Building on impressive county efforts, we've proposed eliminating this waste by closing empty or nearly empty juvenile residential centers across the state, in those counties which have been sending fewer and fewer, or even no children, to state-run facilities.

The closings we plan include:

- Adirondack Residential Center in Clinton County,
- Cattaraugus and Great Valley Residential Centers, in Cattaraugus County,
- Pyramid in The Bronx,
- Rochester Group Home in Monroe County,
- Syracuse Group Home in Onondaga County,
- One unit at the Allen Residential Center in Delaware County,
- Three units at the Tryon Residential Center in Fulton County, and
- Albany, Buffalo, and Syracuse Evening Reporting Centers.

These closings would produce annual savings of nearly \$16.4 million, 50% borne by county taxpayers.

Let me be very clear: the reason the beds in these facilities are empty is because county officials and family court judges in most of these counties aren't sending children to fill them.

But, even with this year's proposed closings, the state will still have more than enough capacity to serve New York's children, families, and communities.

Moreover, these closings will allow the state to continue the ongoing transformation of New York's juvenile justice system from a punitive, corrections-based model to a trauma-informed model, which the preponderance of evidence has established improves outcomes for children and families, and makes communities safer by significantly lowering the rate at which children get in trouble again after their release.

Our top priority is improving outcomes for children. Governor Paterson and I look forward to continue working with counties across the state, which have been so successful in keeping children out of the system. Our goal is to support each of your counties by closing empty juvenile residential centers and reinvesting these taxpayer dollars into programs critical to the well-being of the entire community. 🏡