

**Testimony Presented by
Peter J. Forbes, Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Youth Services
to the
Joint Committee on Ways and Means**

**FISCAL YEAR 2020 BUDGET HEARING
Needham Town Hall**

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Good morning Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

My name is Peter Forbes and I am the Commissioner for the Department of Youth Services (DYS). It is a privilege to appear before you and speak about our Department's mission, priorities and our proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget.

The mission of our Department is to promote positive change in the life trajectory of the youth in our care and custody. Governor Baker's proposed FY 2020 budget of \$178.7 M supports the Department's mission through investment in highly qualified staff and a service continuum that engages youth, families and communities in strategies that support positive youth development. This budget allows DYS to continue to fund effective programming, provide comprehensive staff training, and to reallocate resources and reconfigure programs to better serve the changing demographics and profiles of the youth coming to DYS.

The Department is committed to providing young people with quality education, career readiness, employment opportunities, medical and behavioral health care as well as other services they need to successfully reintegrate into the community. We are well positioned to continue to enhance and advance our service system to align with the emerging science that surrounds adolescent brain development and trauma informed care. Our team is focused on aligning our treatment continuum with our changing population to ensure all youth have access to programming that best fits their needs.

We have a leadership team with extensive experience and expertise in this work. We continue to expand our use of data to inform our decisions and monitor our performance. We are evaluating the use of risk and needs assessment tools to ensure that "the right youth is in the right place for the right reason." We are adopting best practice in our services, and incorporating structured decision-making practices and tools into our work to achieve more objective and consistent decision-making. We challenge our staff to bring new ideas before our leadership team, so that we may benefit from innovation in our service continuum. We continue to collaborate with the Juvenile Court, the Departments of Probation, Children and Families, Public Health, Mental Health and Developmental Services, providers, and community based organizations on system changes and targeted projects that can help on the front end by diverting youth from entering into the juvenile justice system and on the back end in terms of reducing recidivism.

In CY 2018, DYS served 898 committed youth and had 1,079 detention admissions and 1,241 overnight arrest admissions. For the third straight year, the average daily number of youth detained or committed to DYS has decreased. In CY 2018, an average of 118 youth were held on bail at DYS facilities awaiting their next court appearance and an average of 516 committed youth were served in our residential and community settings. This represents a 38% decrease in detained youth and a 22% decrease in committed youth since CY 2015. Over the same three year period, the average age of detained youth increased from

15.8 years in CY 2015 up to 16.4 years in CY 2018 and the average age of committed youth increased from 16.7 years in CY 2015 to 17.4 years in CY 2018. DYS anticipates this trend of serving older youth to continue as a result of the 2013 Raise the Age legislation as well as the 2016 legislation that allows DYS to provide services to youth until they turn 22.

The detained and committed youth are served in a DYS service continuum that is both evidence-based and shaped by promising practices. The service continuum consists of state operated and provider operated programs as described below.

- **43 Residential Programs** ranging from staff secure to hardware secure programs that provide a full array of education, vocational, recreation, clinical, medical and behavioral health services including mental health and substance abuse treatment
- **3 Reception Centers** providing community based options for detained youth who present lower risk profiles
- **3 Independent Living Programs** providing residential and extensive community resource development services to older youth whose aftercare plan is designed around independent living
- **21 District Offices** providing case management, community services and daily supervision for up to 250 youth who are living with a parent, guardian, foster parent or in a transitional living program
- **9 Overnight Arrest Programs** serving the short-term, overnight needs of local police departments by providing overnight accommodations for youth arrested during evening hours and weekends pending their initial court appearance

In order to continue to facilitate job satisfaction, the Department is always exploring ways to improve the work environment for staff from reducing forced overtime, promoting from within, and actively recruiting a diverse workforce. One example is the successful recruitment of veterans to work in our facility in Middleton. Through word of mouth and work with local veterans organizations, our Northeast Region has hired as Group Workers men and women whose military experience make them well suited to work with our youth. The Group Workers represent the largest cohort of DYS staff whose dedication, professionalism, and job satisfaction are key to promoting positive change in youth behavior. I am proud to report that the turnover rate of our DYS' group workers in CY 2018 was 9.7% compared to 25.1% in CY 2017. The Department has three cohorts of group worker staff referred to as Group Worker I's, II's, and III's. In CY 2018, the turnover rates among DYS' Group Worker I's, II's, and III's were 12.2%, 8.6%, and 4.8%, respectively, showing significant improvement over the prior year's rates of 16.5%, 16.5%, and 32.3%, respectively.

In January 2018, DYS opened the Suffolk County Detention Program which is piloting a four 10 hour day per week work schedule for staff instead of the traditional five 8 hour day per week. This alternative schedule will help reduce staff stress and improve youth programming in our 24/7 state operated residences. By providing staff with three consecutive days off, this schedule will reduce the need for mandatory overtime, and allow for more staff on the floor to engage youth in positive programming. In October 2018, students from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government presented their findings after researching the impact this program had on staff satisfaction and the use of overtime. They found that staff, who self-selected into the program, had a resoundingly positive experience with the schedule. Notably, staff had longer periods of overlap between shift changes to update incoming staff on the events that took place with youth during the prior shift. This exchange assists incoming staff in their preparedness with youth who may still be agitated from an earlier event. In addition, the Suffolk County Detention Program experienced significantly less forced overtime, tardiness, and unplanned vacancies than the comparison group. Collectively, this yields financial savings and serves to increase employee retention and morale. Given the positive results, the Department will continue to explore whether this schedule can be successful for other programs.

Staff Safety and Workplace Violence Prevention

Youth and staff safety across the DYS continuum of youth programs continues to be a top priority for DYS. Since the DYS Safety Task Force issued its report, [Recommendations for Promoting Youth and Staff Safety in DYS Residential Programs](#) in February 2018, several of the DYS standing committees have been working on the several recommendations of the Task Force which included improvements in terms of staff retention, programming, messaging, and the agency's responses to incidents. The DYS Policy Steering Committee meets every month to review existing policies and proposed new policies from the Task Force report. The DYS Workforce Planning and Development Workgroup meets every 6-8 weeks to work on the agency's priorities for improving recruitment, on-boarding, training, and coaching of employees. The DYS Safety Committee, which meets every 6 weeks, reviews data on assaults, restraints, room confinement and industrial accidents and works on developing strategies and action plans for improving safety at the state and program levels.

On-going internal efforts to improve safety continue to yield positive results. In CY 2018, the Department experienced a continued downward trend in the use of restraints and room confinement from the prior year. The use of restraints is down 18% and the use of involuntary room confinement is down 15%. While the number of youth on staff assaults increased over the prior year, this has been offset by a decrease in youth on youth assaults. Combined, overall assaults are down 2% over the prior year. Also in CY 2018, the number of days injured staff were out of work was down from CY 2017 by 26% which has translated into a savings of more than \$680,000 in workers compensation costs from a year ago and \$1.3 M from two years ago. These are some of the key data points that DYS and our Safety Committee will continue to regularly monitor and analyze as part of our efforts to improve safety. Moreover, we are looking at how to prevent assaults through a current study to identify the triggers and factors that lead to such incidents.

Educational Services and Career Readiness Training

Educational services and career readiness training are core components to DYS programming for youth in our care and custody. The Department believes that one of the most important and powerful activities supported and delivered by DYS is education. The educational and vocational achievements of our youth are the results of the combined leadership efforts of the staff at DYS, the Collaborative for Educational Services, and Commonwealth Corporation. The Governor's FY 2020 budget includes the funding for the educational services and career readiness training that are foundational to realizing positive life outcome for our youth.

The 2018 education performance data for the DYS committed youth enrolled in General Education shows:

- 100% passed the 10th Grade English Language Arts MCAS for the second straight year;
- 81% passed the 10th Grade Math MCAS, up from 62% the prior year;
- 62% passed the 10th Grade Science MCAS, up from 51% the prior year;
- 95 youth earned their high school diploma;
- 70 youth earned their GED/HiSet, many of whom were able to take the exam in one of the 5 DYS regional sites approved to administer the exam; and,
- 98 youth participated in post-secondary education opportunities, up from 52 the prior year.

In 2018, DYS students with a disability enrolled in Special Education performed as follows:

- 91% passed the 10th Grade English Language Arts MCAS, up from 85% in the prior year;
- 53% passed the 10th Grade Math MCAS, up from 34% the prior year; and

- 46% passed the 10th Grade Science MCAS, up from 42% the prior year.

On the career readiness and employment front, the Department funds the Bridging the Opportunity Gap Initiative (BOG which has served as the primary vehicle for work based learning (career readiness and subsidized employment) and vocational training (career readiness and training in a vocation skill or trade) for our committed youth in the community. In FY 2018, 233 youth participated in the BOG subsidized employment, vocational services, and arts and cultural activities. The Department also offers vocational training for youth in culinary arts, horticulture, and t-shirt silk-screening.

DYS also promotes the creativity our youth display with various forms of art. DYS youth participate in the Art Show State House Rally. On the morning of the rally, youth begin the day at the DYS Executive Offices with a “Kick Off” breakfast and workshop designed to prepare the youth for their meetings at the State House. Over the past several years, the group has been joined by Representative Carolyn Dykema, Representative Kay Khan, Mass Creative and other guests who have been instrumental in assisting our youth prepare while providing support throughout the day. Youth deliver an invitation to the Department’s Annual Statewide Youth Showcase “Share Your Art, Share Your Voice” event to their elected official with a small token of gratitude which consisted of note cards featuring artwork created by youth artists. At the 2018 showcase, youth submitted 272 pieces of art and we were privileged to witness 15 pieces of performance art.

Raise the Age

In FY 2018, the fifth year following the enactment of the Raise the Age legislation in 2013, there were: 182 youth age 17 and older detained for the first time; 130 first time commitments of youth 17 and older; and 424 overnight arrest admissions of youth 17 and older. The 17 and older cohort represents a growing percentage of all youth detained or committed to DYS. As a result, the Department is making strategic investments to fund additional programs and supports for this older, more challenging and complex population with a more serious offense profile and more acute behavioral needs. The Governor’s FY 2020 budget supports these initiatives by reinvesting funding into programs that support the different needs of the older population. This includes programs that focus more on vocational training, employment, post-secondary education, and independent living skills.

Youth Engaged in Services (YES)

The Youth Engaged in Services (YES) program allows DYS to continue to provide support to youth during the highest risk period for recidivism which is the first six months post-discharge. Through a YES voluntary agreement, a youth agrees to abide by the conditions of the agreement in exchange for continuing case management and other transitional supports, such as housing, clinical services, continued education, treatment and/or job training. In FY 2018, 218 youth (56% of those discharged) signed an agreement with DYS for voluntary services post discharge, representing a 10% increase over the prior year. To date, the average duration of voluntary services engagement is six months. The Governor’s FY 2020 budget supports DYS to continue providing YES supports.

Strategic Planning

DYS issued a (RFR) for a Strategic Planning consultant to assist the Department with the design, development and completion of a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process that will result in an agency blueprint to provide policy direction for DYS operations and capital assets over the next 10 years and an actionable strategic plan for implementation from 2019 to 2021. Ten responses were received; DYS interviewed the top three responses and is currently in contract negotiations with the

selected consultant. Concurrently, DYS has partnered with DCAMM to prepare a new 10 year Facilities Master Plan which will align with and incorporate input from the updated Strategic Plan.

For FY 2020, DYS is adapting its program continuum for committed youth by providing assessment services within our treatment programs. This change increases operating efficiency by reducing vacancies and increasing the utilization of resources within our programs. In addition, this increase in efficiency directly benefits youth by reducing the number of placements for youth in our continuum.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Second Chance Act Smart on Juvenile Justice Grant

The Department has completed the first phase of the OJJDP Second Chance Act Smart on Juvenile Justice: Community Supervision Program Grant that funded a DYS strategic initiative to reduce recidivism and increase public safety by improving community supervision for youth that are medium to high risk for re-offending. In 2018, we conducted the First Annual Family Advisory Council Symposium, hired a full-time Employer Outreach Specialist (EOS) to build corporate partnerships necessary to placing youth in meaningful employment that lead to long-term careers, and continued to prioritize addressing unequal treatment and disproportionate minority representation within the Department by expanding our facilitator-led workshops on increasing racial awareness and diversity. We also continue to implement the use of a Graduated Response Grid System¹ designed to reduce disruptive and harmful behaviors, while increasing pro-social behaviors for youth in the community.

In FY 2019, DYS has partnered with the Department of Probation and the Committee for Public Counsel Services on the Massachusetts Positive Youth Outcome and Recidivism Reduction Strategy grant awarded by OJJDP. Through this grant, we are piloting strategies for reducing recidivism that will include increasing the use of validated risk and needs assessments to inform supervision, service, and resource-allocation decisions; prioritizing services for youth most likely to reoffend; minimizing the use of confinement; using specialized, validated screenings to identify youth with mental health and substance use treatment needs and match them to service; minimizing juvenile justice intervention when appropriate; and tailoring policies, programs and practices to reflect the developmental needs of adolescents

Conclusion

The FY 2020 House 1 budget of \$178.7 M submitted by Governor Baker and Secretary Sudders supports continued progress for the Department of Youth Services and allows the Department to reallocate funds to better meet the needs of our current population. We will continue to align our resources in the most efficient manner to sustain improvement in our priority areas and adapt to the changing age of our core population. We will pursue active collaboration with our stakeholders to ensure that Massachusetts has an effective approach that supports court involved youth. We will continue to improve our residential treatment and community re-entry services to increase our success with the highest risk youth population. Our focus will be to continue to develop and implement programming that is effective with an evolving population that is older, presents a more serious offense history and more complex behavioral profile.

In short, DYS will focus on delivering a system where:

¹ A Graduated Response Grid System provides strategies for effective response to youth behavior. The responses are designed to encourage and reinforce positive behaviors and discourage negative behaviors with consequences that hold the youth accountable for their disruptive or harmful behavior.

- Youth in the Department's care and custody can achieve their maximum potential in school, work and life;
- Families are supported;
- Communities are safer;
- Recidivism rates are lower for the DYS involved youth that we serve; and,
- DYS staff and partners are valued and recognized for their dedication, skill and professionalism.

DYS will continue to be strategic in our investments and maintain a platform of core service elements – education and vocational services, clinical and medical services, a qualified workforce, safe programs – in order to be successful in achieving our mission.

I look forward to working with this Committee and the entire Legislature to successfully continue to make progress on our core goals and objectives. On behalf of Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito and Secretary Sudders, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on how our proposed Fiscal Year 2020 budget will further the Department's mission.

Thank you for your time.