



Department of
Youth Services



Ohio



Juvenile Justice Working Group

2026 Q1 Recommendations Update

Table of Contents

Introduction

Creation and Efforts of the JJWG	2
----------------------------------	---

Progress on Recommendations

Recommendation 1: System Transformation	3
Recommendation 2: Review of Operations	3
Recommendation 3: Benefits and Considerations of Smaller Facilities	4
Recommendation 4: Collaboration with State Agencies	4
Recommendation 5: Department of Youth Services (DYS) & Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) Collaboration	5
Recommendation 6: Prosecution of Violent Institutional Offenses	5
Recommendation 7: Legislation to Change Age of Commitment	5
Recommendation 8: Legislation Related to Mandatory Gun Specifications	5
Recommendation 9: Legislation Related to Low-Level Felony Sentencing	6
Recommendation 10: Ohio Bindover Statutes Evaluation	6
Recommendation 11: Funding for Community Correctional Facilities (CCFs) in Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton Counties	6
Recommendation 12: Establish Uniform Standards and Criteria for CCF Admissions	7
Recommendation 13: Alternative Placement for Youth with Special Needs	7-8
Recommendation 14: American Correctional Association (ACA) and Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Accreditation of Juvenile Detention Centers	9
Recommendation 15: Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) and CCF Implementation of Expert Recommendations on Training	9
Recommendation 16: Addressing Gang Activity, Security Threat Groups, and Bullying	9-10
Recommendation 17: Addressing the Need for Behavioral Health Services	10
Recommendation 18: Strategic Plans of JDCs to Deliver Behavioral Health Services	10
Recommendation 19: Developing Family Resources in Local Juvenile Courts	11-12
Recommendation 20: Implementation of the Stepping Up Initiative	13
Recommendation 21: Implementation of the Credible Messengers Program	13
Recommendation 22: Establish a Parent-Guardian Liaison to Assist Families	14
Recommendation 23: Helping Youth Reintegrate After Incarceration	14-15
Recommendation 24: Implementation of Strong Staff Wellness Programs	15
Recommendation 25: DYS Collaboration with Colleges/Universities to Develop Staff	16
Recommendation 26: Addressing Leadership Development and Succession Planning	16

Introduction

Creation and Efforts of the Juvenile Justice Working Group (JJWG)

Back in November 2023, the Juvenile Justice Working Group (JJWG) was created to conduct a thorough, holistic review of juvenile justice in Ohio, including the operations at the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS), county juvenile detention facilities, as well as Community Corrections Facilities throughout the state.

The Juvenile Justice Working Group held several public meetings and hosted a tour for members at a DYS facility. The group was chaired by Tom Stickrath, former director of both DYS and Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS). Mr. Stickrath is also the current chair of the National Commission on Accreditation for Corrections.

The Juvenile Justice Working Group culminated with a report published in September 2024, which detailed 26 recommendations that address youth safety, education, reentry support, population management, health and mental health services, as well as staffing levels, staff safety, training, recruitment, and retention.

This updated report reflects the progress made on these 26 recommendations.

Progress on Recommendations

Recommendation 1: System Transformation

DYS is continuing to move forward with smaller, campus-style facilities to improve youth outcomes. The new design includes 36-bed facilities that are planned on selected properties, one in Grafton, Ohio, and one in Bedford, Ohio, the first of which is expected to open in CY 2027-2028. The new facilities will be designed to provide a tested and proven security infrastructure while also providing a more trauma-responsive and normative environment for the youth population. The agency is finalizing the schematic design phase for two different designs for the CHJCF replacement, and future transformation phases will focus on Indian River and then Circleville. Funding was approved by the Controlling Board of \$130M to support the projected construction expenditures. The groundbreaking is scheduled for May 12, 2026.

Recommendation 2: Review of Operations

An outside consultant firm has completed their review of DYS operations at the three state facilities, as well as operations at a sample of Juvenile Detention Centers (JDCs) and Community Corrections Facilities (CCFs). The review began at Oakview Juvenile Residential Center on March 31 and concluded at the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center on June 24. All reviews were completed on June 24, 2025. This review focused on behavioral health services, training, youth discipline, separation, and use of force to help identify areas of strength and improvements to inform future policy decisions. The outside consultant firm has completed their review, once received, DYS will review all the related recommendations.

Recommendation 3: Benefits and Considerations of Smaller Facilities

The design and population of the first new centers will be influenced by the unique characteristics of the Bedford property based on forthcoming architectural designs. Discussions are ongoing to determine the best population to initially occupy the new facilities.

Recommendation 4: Collaboration with State Agencies

We are collaborating with other state agencies and The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center on its Collaborating for Youth and Public Safety Initiative (CYSPI). DYS and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) met with CSG on in June 2025 and developed a cross agency leadership meeting cadence. CSG also met with the participating state agencies, which include the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW), Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (ODD), Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM), and Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (OBH).

Since its inception last summer, CSG has held listening sessions and has continued with inter-agency meetings to help build resources for youth and their families to prevent them from entering the juvenile justice system. Lillian Clossman from DCY is chairing the state agency team working with CSG, and Mike Garrett of DYS is co-chair. CSG has submitted final recommendations regarding a vision for enhanced inter-agency coordination to meet the needs of complex youth. DYS is ensuring these needs are met through work with other organizations, seeking cross-agency grant opportunities, and creating cross-agency work groups when needed.

Recommendation 5: DYS & OSHP Collaboration

DYS is collaborating with the Ohio State Highway Patrol to improve intelligence sharing, enhance security, and prevent contraband from entering facilities. Specifically, our chief inspector and facility leadership now meet monthly with the OSHP investigator assigned to each facility to discuss cases and share information. Additionally, DYS shares intelligence and communicates with OSHP about cases that are taken to the prosecutor's office. This recommendation has been fulfilled and will be ongoing.

Recommendation 6: Prosecution of Violent Institutional Offenses

DYS did not receive the full funding as recommended in the Governor's budget, but the agency could pursue funding in future budgets bills. There has been no further action on this recommendation at this time.

Recommendation 7: Legislation to Change Age of Commitment

DYS worked with Senator Manning on language to address the recommendation. The Senator introduced the bill in September under S.B. 270. The bill had its first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2025. DYS met with LSC to develop clarity to language in the original bill.

Recommendation 8: Legislation Related to Mandatory Gun Specifications

DYS worked with Senator Manning on language to address the recommendation. The Senator introduced the bill in September under S.B. 270. The bill had its first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2025. DYS met with LSC to develop clarity to language in the original bill.

Recommendation 9: Legislation Related to Low-Level Felony Sentencing

DYS worked with Senator Manning on language to address the recommendation. The Senator introduced the bill in September under S.B. 270. The bill had its first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2025. DYS met with LSC to develop clarity to language in the original bill.

Recommendation 10: Ohio Bindover Statutes Evaluation

The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission (OCSC) is in the process evaluating Ohio's bindover statutes. The OCSC's Juvenile Justice Subcommittee has discussed the topic during at least two meetings, and a state representative has drafted legislation. The state representative has been circulating it to interested parties for feedback. There has been no further action at this time

Recommendation 11: Funding for CCFs in Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton Counties

Cuyahoga County was selected as the location for the CCF in the current round. Details for beginning the siting and operationalizing have begun. Funding for CCFs in Franklin and Hamilton Counties will be sought in upcoming capital budget cycles. A MOU between Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court (CCJC) and DYS was developed, signed, and executed. Similarly, DAS and DYS drafted a sub-lease agreement and received it back from CCJC to allow the funds to be encumbered - it is pending county approval.. Once revisions are in place and funds are encumbered, DYS will approach the General Assembly about awarding funds to add another CCF. Most recently, capital funds were released by the Controlling Board for the CCJC.

Recommendation 12: Establish Uniform Standards and Criteria for CCF Admissions

After DYS staff and CCF directors agreed to a set of uniform standards criteria for CCF admissions, they have been established for all CCFs. Feedback from CCF directors was used to finalize the process and was incorporated into the FY26 CCF grant agreements.

Additionally, in the monthly indicator report that captures statistical information on admissions and denials of youth, it was updated to include reasons for denials and based off of the new admission criteria. This addition will allow DYS to monitor CCF adherence to the uniform admission criteria.

DYS has also been monitoring CCF bed utilization as a measure of efficacy of the new admission criteria. Data has indicated improved bed utilization across all sites, which has been around 90-100% utilization.

Recommendation 13: Alternative Placement for Youth with Special Needs

DYS elected to adopt the definition contained in the recommendation as: total blindness, profound deafness, wheelchair confinement, and other similar physical disabilities and/or factors. The agency representatives typically consulted prior to the commitment of special needs youth have agreed to advocate that the court maintain special needs youth in their homes with community services wrapped around the youth/family.

A primary focus of DYS is to influence the early stages of the judicial process. The agency is actively encouraging the Supreme Court of Ohio to incorporate specific language into judicial bench cards. This language is designed to prompt juvenile judges to consider alternative placement facilities better equipped for specialized care before finalizing a DYS commitment. DYS will continue its advocacy to ensure these standards.

To streamline this process at the point of entry, the "County Commitments to DYS and Scheduling Youth for Court Hearings" digital resource has been officially updated. The revised County Call-In Form now mandates the clear identification of key alerts, including mental health concerns, medical requirements, or physical disabilities.

DYS continues to advocate for the formation of a formal multi-agency group to consult with courts on dispositions for youth with special needs. Additionally, the agency promotes the use of alternative placements.

DYS facilitated the administration of a four-question survey developed by Nationwide Children's Hospital to eleven Community Corrections Facilities (CCF) and hosted a tour of the Center for Adolescent Services (CAS) CCF in Montgomery County. Nationwide indicated that they had dramatically increased their understanding of medical resources available at the CCFs and an increased appreciation of the unique nature of the medical capacity of the individual CCFs. Nationwide shared some medical resource contacts and has expressed no need for further engagement.

When a court completes the eDIR, they must indicate whether a youth has a special need. The DYS Bureau of Records also worked on updating the call-in page on the website to include special needs language.

Recommendation 14: ACA and PREA Accreditation of Juvenile Detention Centers

DYS did not receive the full funding as recommended in the Governor's budget, but the agency could pursue funding in future budgets bills. Once the funding situation is more clear, DYS will again begin working with the American Correctional Association (ACA) and Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) leadership to schedule an in-person educational session for juvenile court administrators and detention center directors that will focus on the process and benefits associated with ACA and PREA accreditation.

Recommendation 15: JDC and CCF Implementation of Expert Recommendations on Training

The outside consultant firm completed their review of CCFs and JDCs. Once a final report is received, expected around April 2026, DYS will review all the related recommendations regarding the JDCs and CCFs with the directors.

Recommendation 16: Addressing Gang Activity, Security Threat Groups, and Bullying

DYS continues to meet and collaborate as a formal workgroup towards developing and implementing strategies for addressing security threat groups and bullying. The security threat group policy is being finalized and focuses heavily on intelligence and communication, as well as classification for informative, rather than punitive, purposes.

The workgroup is focused on identifying practices to reduce bullying behaviors that closely resemble or may lead to security threat group behaviors. Preliminary drafts of policy updates and assessment revisions for STG and Security classifications are in the final stages of development to submit a proposal to the Director's Office.

Recommendation 17: Addressing the Need for Behavioral Health Services

DYS is working to expand access to behavioral health services for youth in facilities, including exploring partnerships with local behavioral health agencies across the state. DYS had four community behavioral health agencies respond to the RFP. Additionally, DYS has selected two of the four community behavioral health agencies based on cost, projected service hours in the facilities. Applewood was selected for Indian River and Cuyahoga Hills facilities while Motivated & Empowered was selected for the Circleville facility. Funding was approved through the Controlling Board for this initiative.

Recommendation 18: Strategic Plans of JDCs to Deliver Behavioral Health Services

DYS behavioral health staff developed a self-assessment tool that was made available to all JDCs. While no interest in using the self-assessment tool has been expressed at this time, Behavioral Health Services at DYS identified a contact at DBH who agreed to help JDCs seeking a consultant for youth with behavioral health needs. There is no further action on this recommendation at this time.

Recommendation 19: Developing Family Resources in Local Juvenile Courts

DYS continues to work on multiple items to strengthen family support resources in local juvenile courts. Over the last few months, the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) presented information regarding access to Medicaid services to the Resource/Assessment Center Learning Collaborative, Targeted RECLAIM and Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) projects, and the Ohio Juvenile Court Administrators. These efforts aim to enhance understanding and utilization of Medicaid services among relevant stakeholders and programs.

Ohio currently has 23 locally run and operated resource and assessment centers to holistically serve the needs of youth and families in their local communities. These centers are proving to be a vital prevention alternative to the juvenile justice system by proactively addressing families' basic needs, informing court operations, facilitating crucial linkages to mental health services, and other interventions.

Some centers are demonstrating innovative approaches, such as working with local food pantries, operating summer school lunch programs, and more. A strong focus remains on broadening services and interventions through robust collaboration with local agencies and other organizations to support Ohio families.

DYS has also engaged with the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) to gain a deeper understanding of the Ohio Prevention Services Plan to plan for future collaboration to enhance local family resources.

The Competitive RECLAIM initiative awarded grants that expanded the number of local behavior change programs supported by DYS from 15 to 26. Furthermore, grants awarded through the Behavioral Health Juvenile Justice (BHJJ) initiative enabled support to extend from 11 to 13 local projects. With the award of those grants, the internal workgroup's efforts shifted to two long-term efforts, including determining what resources are available in select counties (resource mapping) and working with Google to develop a DYS Subsidy Grant database. The current focus is to notify the counties of their status by mid-May, with grant payments scheduled to be made in June of this fiscal year.

Another initiative is the ongoing collaboration with Google on building the subsidy grant database. Some features, such as application submission, have been constructed and are being piloted while others remain under development. Funding has been secured for the remainder of SFY-26 and all SFY-27. The scope of work for Phase 2 has been agreed upon, and the final touches are being completed.

Additionally, DYS has continued to participate in Juvenile Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM), a strategic, collaborative process where communities map how individuals with behavioral health or substance use issues interact with the criminal justice system, child welfare system, education system, etc.

Lastly, DYS released a request For Proposals (RFP) seeking to expand local resources across four distinct categories (Credible Messengers, Law Enforcement Pre-Arrest Diversion/Deflection, Restorative Justice, and New Community Resource Centers). It is anticipated that awards will result in further growth of front-end family resources. Responses are currently being reviewed with an anticipated decision in May 2026.

Recommendation 20: Implementation of the Stepping Up Initiative

Director Ast and Director Cornyn continued to collaborate on the best utilization of resources regarding this initiative and others, especially as it pertains to mental health awareness, prevention, and intervention for youth and families. This recommendation has been fulfilled.

Recommendation 21: Implementation of Credible Messenger Programs

While the vision of the JJWG included the release of a Credible Messenger RFP and contracting for the service, recommendation 21 requires that the agency release a Credible Messenger RFI and develop outcomes to ensure the support of program standards, proper vetting procedures, and other appropriate requirements.

After releasing the RFI, responses to the RFI are being used to inform the development of an RFP for a Credible Messenger program. Strategies for increasing youth participation in the development of the RFP and scoring of responses to the RFP were discussed. Several other Credible Messenger endeavors are currently being pursued.

There has been discussion about piloting a Credible Messenger project to demonstrate the effectiveness of the metrics discussed. Additionally, ideas for funding a pilot project were discussed and eventually using metrics for all services purchased by the agency. The recommendation has been fulfilled.

Recommendation 22: Establish a Parent-Guardian Liaison to Assist Families

This position of Family Support Specialist has been filled and the policy is under review. Internal communications have been disseminated and parents and guardians have been notified and made aware of the process for contacting the Family Support Specialist. Information is also available on the DYS website. This recommendation has been fulfilled.

Recommendation 23: Helping Youth Reintegrate After Incarceration

Reentry for youth remains a critical priority at our agency as we continue to work to expand Medicaid coverage for DYS youth 30 days prior to release and after post-release. DYS has filled two of the three Health Information Technician (HIT) positions. The HITs have been trained on the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool. Additionally, the HITs are in the final stages of practical observation, participating in Interdisciplinary Team meetings (IDTs), and expected to participate in the Parole Reentry Plan Staffing (PRPS) and the final IDT to ensure that Medicaid coverage and community linkage are in place.

Parole Reentry Plan Staffing (PRPS) has been fully established and appear to be functioning well at the Circleville facility, with expansion to include all Southern Region and Cuyahoga County youth at the Cuyahoga Hills facility and the Indian River facility.

The DYS Best Practices Institute has provided a list of possible outcome measures for the reentry continuum and are still considering measures to gauge whether the process is operating as intended.

DYS has also developed an online Parole and Reentry Resource Guide to serve as an aid to parole and reentry staff in addressing the needs of the youths and families with whom they work.

The agency also continues to work with community partners to expand career tech, credentials, and training opportunities for youth who have completed their high school education. A few examples include fostering and expanding services for youth with BUILD and Project Lift along with a partnership with The Trades Institute in Greene County for youth to earn career certificates.

Due to the recommendations and needs, several committees were formed to promote this ongoing work, including the education/vocational committee, health and behavioral health committee, and the pro-social community connections committee.

Recommendation 24: Implementation of Strong Staff Wellness Programs

DYS has implemented a variety of initiatives to promote staff wellness, including wellness events, peer support, training programs, and the Pup Patrol therapy dog program. We have also been recognized two years in a row by the Mental Health America's Gold Bell Seal certification for workplace wellness initiatives and is the only state agency that has achieved this designation two years in a row and most recently achieved the Platinum Bell Seal two years in a row. DYS also has a pending partnership with the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation to provide educational trainings to our staff and youth.

DYS was also recently designated as a [Recovery Friendly Workplace](#), which helps employers assist employees with mental health or substance use disorders to seek recovery. This work is ongoing.

Recommendation 25: DYS Collaboration with Colleges/Universities to Develop Juvenile Justice Staff

Back in 2022, DYS worked to expand internship opportunities for college students in social work and clinical counseling, providing valuable experience for future juvenile justice professionals. With over ten colleges and universities involved, these partnerships have led to jobs at our agency. DYS has increased the partnership with colleges and universities to expand the clinical internship opportunities available to social work and counseling majors. The last meeting with OSU College of Social Work was in June 2025 and there is a follow-up meeting tentatively planned for October. This is ongoing work around how to best prepare students to enter the juvenile justice behavioral health workforce. There is no further action on this recommendation at this time.

Recommendation 26: Addressing Leadership Development and Succession Planning

DYS middle-manager training launched in July at the training academy. The pilot was a 3-day fully experiential training that allowed participants to evaluate and improve their skills regarding setting goals and expectations, holding themselves and others accountable, supervising and coaching people, cultivating situational awareness, managing time and resources, conducting a debrief, pivoting according to situations, balancing attention between people and tasks, communicating effectively, and receiving constructive criticism. A total of 16 employees participated. We reached 100% of all our goals. The middle-manager training pilot in July proved to be successful, and we intend to keep facilitating this training every 2-3 months until further notice with three cohorts so far to date.