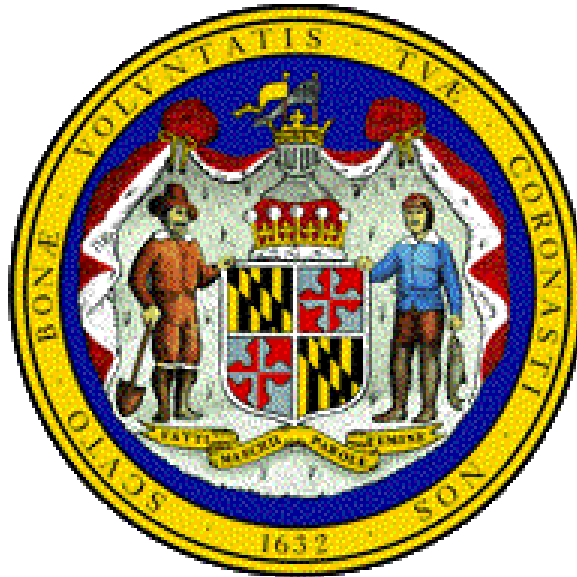




OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

STATE OF MARYLAND

**2024 CALENDAR YEAR FOURTH QUARTER AND
ANNUAL REPORT**

The Maryland Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU)

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) is responsible for reporting on Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) operated and licensed facilities across the state. Monitors from the unit conduct unannounced visits to these sites to guard against abuse and ensure youth receive appropriate treatment and services.

The mission of the JJMU is to promote the transformation of the juvenile justice system into one that meets the needs of Maryland's youth, families, and communities. This mission is accomplished by collaborating with all who are involved with the system.

The Unit has access to DJS incident and case note databases and to DJS internal investigation and grievance documents. Monitors spend considerable time gathering information and observing all aspects of operations. We sit in on activities and classes, interview youth, staff and administrators, and review incident-related footage and original incident report documentation.

The JJMU issues public reports covering each quarter, which include data and analysis concerning treatment of and services provided to youth in DJS detention and placement facilities throughout our state. Formal responses from DJS and the Juvenile Services Education Program (JSEP), which is responsible for education services in DJS facilities, are included within our published reports.

The JJMU has been instrumental in driving positive changes in the Maryland juvenile justice system since its formation in the wake of widespread systemic abuse issues. The activities of the monitoring unit increase the transparency and accountability of the juvenile justice system and raise awareness of the needs of justice-involved Maryland youth. We will continue to push for the adoption of best practices as we evaluate current and emerging research that serves to both enhance public safety and produce positive outcomes for young people in contact with the juvenile justice system.

JJMU 2024 Calendar Year Fourth Quarter and Annual Report - Compendium

The Maryland Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) issues public reports covering each quarter that include data and analysis concerning treatment of and services provided to youth in Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) directly run and licensed facilities throughout Maryland. Enclosed please find the unit's compilation of 2024 calendar year fourth quarter and annual reports.

The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' response and a response from the Juvenile Services Education Program (JSEP) are included, as indicated on the contents page.

The JJMU calendar year 2024 Fourth Quarter and Annual Report compendium was produced by Margi Joshi, Nick Moroney, Antoinette Pigatt and Marvin Stone.

We respectfully submit this report to the Governor, members of the Maryland General Assembly, and the Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Services, as required under Maryland law.



OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT
STATE OF MARYLAND

March 2025

The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor
State of Maryland

The Honorable Bill Ferguson, President of the Senate
Maryland General Assembly

The Honorable Adrienne Jones, Speaker of the House of Delegates
Maryland General Assembly

Members of the Maryland General Assembly

The Honorable Vincent Schiraldi, Secretary
Maryland Department of Juvenile Services

The Honorable Andre Davis, Chairperson
Maryland Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging Best Practices

The Honorable Dorothy Lennig, Executive Director
Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy

Dear Governor Moore, Senate President Ferguson, Speaker of the House Jones, Secretary Schiraldi, Judge Davis, and Director Lennig,

This compilation of reports summarizes conditions in detention and placement facilities operated by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) during the 2024 calendar year and includes the calendar year 2024 fourth quarter report.

In addition to individual facility reports and a systemic overview of facility-based operations, there is a section that details the comprehensive services, programming and protections available in DJS-operated facilities. However, as stated near the beginning of this

special section: “There is a critical need for more community-based resources and interventions throughout the state if we seek to prevent justice system involvement for kids.”

In the systemic overview section entitled “Facility Trends”, areas of focus include staff retention and morale and a need to address the plight of girls and young women in the deep end of the system. Recommendations for improvements are included.

All DJS-operated detention centers are impacted by increases in the number of children and young people charged as adults. The proportion of youth in these facilities that have been charged as juveniles used to constitute the overwhelming proportion of those held in DJS secure detention, however, that situation has changed drastically over just the past couple of years. Now, most of the youth held in DJS detention facilities are youth charged as adults.

As noted in the individual detention center reports: The vast majority of youth charged as adults do not end up in the adult carceral system and many are eventually transferred to the juvenile justice system. However, youth charged as adults are forced to spend months or even a year or more on dead time (without individualized help or treatment) in maximum security detention centers as they wait for a court decision. Many hope for a transfer to the juvenile system so that they can begin receiving targeted, in-depth treatment and rehabilitative services that will meet their needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Nick Moroney

Nick Moroney
Maryland Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit

JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT CALENDAR YEAR 2024 4th QUARTER AND ANNUAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW OF DJS-OPERATED FACILITY PROGRAMMING, SERVICES AND PROTECTIONS.....	7
INCIDENT AND POPULATION TRENDS.....	14
FACILITY TRENDS.....	15
DETENTION CENTERS.....	19
Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center	20
Cheltenham Youth Detention Center.....	24
Charles H. Hickey, Jr., School.....	28
Thomas J.S. Waxter Children's Center	32
Alfred D. Noyes Children's Center.....	33
Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center	34
Western Maryland Children's Center	36
COMMITTED PLACEMENT CENTERS.....	39
Victor Cullen Center.....	40
Garrett Children's Center.....	43
Youth Centers X2.....	44
Silver Oak Academy.....	47
JUVENILE SERVICES EDUCATION PROGRAM (JSEP).....	48
SMALLER FACILITY UPDATES	53
DJS RESPONSE.....	56
JSEP (EDUCATION SERVICES) RESPONSE.....	65

OVERVIEW OF DJS-OPERATED FACILITY PROGRAMMING, SERVICES, AND PROTECTIONS

OVERVIEW OF DJS-OPERATED FACILITY PROGRAMMING, SERVICES, AND PROTECTIONS

Holistic and multi-systemic approaches that develop and leverage local resources and that are focused on establishing community safety and providing mental health, education, and employment resources within under-resourced neighborhoods are vital components of any effort to tackle the complex root causes of violence and delinquency. There is a critical need for more community-based resources and interventions throughout the state, if we seek to prevent justice system involvement for kids.

In contrast, incarceration is not an effective tool for addressing behavioral issues in young people. The experience and conditions of confinement can often exacerbate underlying trauma, mental health, substance abuse, and family-related issues that may have been initial contributors to a child's involvement in the justice system to begin with and confinement may also contribute to future harm. Young people with a history of incarceration have poorer health, mental health, education, and employment outcomes, and institutionalization puts kids at risk of sexual abuse and physical assault.

Unfortunately, because of the absence of robust community supports, contact with the deep end of the juvenile system (secure confinement) may be the first time young people and their families have some access to treatment and services to address the root causes of problem behavior.

The juvenile justice system, while in need of improvement, is the best place for young people whom courts have decided should be removed from the community because of the high risk they pose to public safety. Unlike in adult correctional facilities, the department's secure juvenile detention and placement centers have policies, practices, programming, and protections tailored to be buffers for young people against the inherent dangers and trauma of incarceration and to mitigate the disruptions in development that accompany a young person's removal from his or her home and community. The juvenile justice system in general, and DJS facilities in particular, are far better equipped than the adult criminal justice system to protect young people from harm and to provide opportunities and services for young people and their families in difficult circumstances.

The following chart provides a brief overview of the services and protections afforded to young people in DJS custody.

Medical Services

Medical Services are overseen by a highly experienced board-certified pediatrician well versed in best practices in adolescent health

The "big three" detention centers, BCJJC, Hickey, and CYDC, have infirmaries where youth needing specialized medical care are housed.

*Mental Health Care
Services*

Nursing staff are available 24/7 at some facilities and are available in-person during waking hours at other facilities. All facilities have on-call nursing; access to a physician; and access to a dental care provider in case of emergency.

Youth are also referred to nearby medical centers for both emergent and specialized care.

Nursing staff evaluate all youth involved in physical restraints and all youth on seclusion (at periodic intervals).

Detention:

Clinicians are on-site during waking hours to provide crisis intervention and incident debriefings, conduct suicide assessments, monitor kids in seclusion (isolation) and on suicide watch, and run psychoeducational groups.

Young people on pending placement units at BCJJC and CYDC receive more in-depth therapeutic and rehabilitative services. This program reduces the “dead time” (incarcerated without individualized treatment or time counting) that young people experience while they are waiting for spots at placement centers to open. Detention facilities are also located closer to young people’s communities and families and detention center staff can better facilitate family and community engagement than is possible to do at the remotely located placement centers.

Placement:

In addition to the mental health services available at detention centers, young people in placement receive in-depth group and individual treatment services grounded in evidence-based therapies (such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy [DBT] and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy [CBT]). Family therapy and substance abuse treatment services (Seven Challenges) are also provided.

*Case Management
Services*

Young people have regular contact with facility case managers who provide programming and services to youth inside each facility. Many case managers are highly accessible as they have offices inside youth living units. Young people also have an assigned community case manager to assist with family contact, provide updates to the court regarding the youth’s progress, and assist with after-care services.

<i>Recreation Services</i>	All young people have mandated access to at least one-hour of large muscle activity per day unless they are under activity restriction for medical reasons, One or more recreation specialist is available at each facility to plan and carry out developmentally appropriate physical activities for young people. Facilities hold intra- and inter-facility sports competitions which teach skills such as teamwork, perseverance, responsibility, and goal setting.
<i>Education Services</i>	An independent school board and superintendent (of the Juvenile Services Education Program [JSEP]) run the schools inside DJS-operated detention and placement centers. Board meetings are held virtually and are available for public viewing. Public comments are permitted. Students attend school six hours per day, year-round, and receive instruction in the core content areas of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Special education teachers at each school ensure the provision of services for students with IEPs, and guidance counselors are available to review student academic progress and facilitate transition back to community schools upon release. JSEP offers test preparation and for administers the GED test for qualifying students.
<i>Post-secondary Education Services</i>	JSEP offers access to community college classes online for high school graduates. High school graduates placed at Backbone Youth Center can attend the local community college in-person provided their stay aligns with the academic semester. JSEP recently implemented virtual reality and online training options in various skilled trades and disciplines.
<i>Employment Opportunities</i>	DJS has partnered with other state agencies to offer incarcerated young people job internship opportunities that could potentially lead to sustainable employment upon release. The program, named YOLO, allows eligible high school graduates in DJS-operated placement sites to perform supervised work off-site up to 3 days a week.

	The YOLO work program has been expanded to include eligible high school graduates in detention at BCJJC and Hickey. Eligible detained young people get paid for completing supervised work tasks inside of facilities.
<i>Family Engagement</i>	DJS recognizes the necessity of family contact and engagement in fostering positive youth outcomes. Facility administrators and staff provide: Access to free phone calls to families (105 minutes per week). In-person visitation any day of the week with prior notice. Monthly (at a minimum) facility and school-related family engagement events.
<i>Community Engagement</i>	Detention facilities are centrally located and are near most detained youth families and communities (with the notable exception of girls in secure detention). BCJJC, CYDC, and Hickey have highly involved community advisory boards and/or community organizations that provide support and programming for the incarcerated young people. Youth at Green Ridge Youth Center regularly take part in outings to nearby community institutions and attractions for enrichment, educational, and volunteer purposes. The Victor Cullen placement center for boys has begun to offer outings off campus to eligible youth on a limited basis.
<i>Programming</i>	Administrators are expected to offer structured programming options to foster positive youth development. The number of programs and type of options available varies from facility to facility, but examples include: -A staff-led ROTC program at LESCC. -A combined mentorship and physical education program run by recreation specialists at Hickey. -A music studio for youth use at BCJJC. -A life skills class offered by a community volunteer at CYDC. -Pickleball lessons offered bi-monthly at WMCC by a community volunteer. -A weekend outdoor experiential learning program called Reflections based at Backbone Mountain Youth Center and run by experienced outdoor recreation specialists. Youth

	from various DJS placement facilities participate in Reflections. DJS also sponsors recreational, arts-based, academic, and athletic competitions across all facilities. JSEP periodically offers after-school programming for youth. After-school clubs have included cooking classes, book clubs, GED tutoring assistance, and a course called Introduction to the Foundations of Entrepreneurship.
<i>Staff Training</i>	DJS staff training is specifically geared toward working with young people and includes modules on positive youth development, child and adolescent development, trauma-informed care, mental health first aid, and strategies for de-escalation and conflict resolution.
<i>Examples of Protections for Young People: Use of seclusion; suicide assessment; incidents involving aggression or physical restraint of youth; and the grievance process</i>	There are restrictions on the use of seclusion (meaning isolation) for young people in DJS juvenile detention and placement centers, and safeguards when seclusion is utilized. For example, the use of seclusion (isolation) is restricted by departmental policy to include only those young people who pose an imminent physical threat to themselves and others - seclusion is not permitted to be used punitively. Under this policy, young people are required to be released from seclusion once they are de-escalated. Youth in seclusion receive mandated periodic check-ins from medical and behavioral health professionals and supervisory staff and, in DJS facilities, seclusion rarely exceeds 4 hours. Youth on suicide watch and at high risk for suicide are placed on a 1:1 staff to youth ratio and are monitored by mental health clinicians and staff. Youth involved in restraints or incidents of physical aggression receive prompt medical evaluation and access to mental health clinicians for crisis debriefing. Youth have access to the internal DJS grievance process to report concerns about their care. DJS child advocates retrieve grievances on a weekly basis and address youth concerns with facility management as well as with the youth.
<i>Transparency and Oversight</i>	Facilities are required to report all incidents involving aggression; physical restraint of youth by staff; use of seclusion; suicide ideation or attempt; and incidents involving contraband within an internal DJS database. Supervisors are

required to review incidents for adherence to policy and to make notifications as required by policy. Parents are contacted when their child is involved in an incident.

The DJS Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigates and reports (internally) on allegations of abuse, neglect, PREA violations and inappropriate staff conduct.

The OIG Audit Team conducts routine audits of facilities to assess whether facility administrators and staff are adhering to policy regarding safety, security, care and services. The team issues internal reports documenting audit results.

External oversight agencies include the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit within the Office of Correctional Ombudsman and the Office of the Public Defender Juvenile Protection Division. The JJMU issues public reports about DJS facilities.

The Maryland Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices was created in 2024 to oversee and enhance service delivery within the juvenile justice system, including juvenile detention and placement facilities.

Human rights advocates have noted, “Children in Maryland are so much more than the worst thing they have ever done, and they deserve a chance at redemption in a trauma-informed, age-appropriate system that was built with their well-being and rehabilitation in mind.”¹

There are inherent challenges in providing effective services and care and in ensuring a safe and healing environment within carceral facilities. However, it is only within the confines of the juvenile justice system (which is oriented toward serving the needs of young people, their families, and their communities²) that some of the challenges youth face can be acknowledged and overcome.

¹ Human Rights for Kids (November 2024), Disposable Children: The Prevalence of Child Abuse and Trauma Among Children Prosecuted and Incarcerated as Adults in Maryland (page 28), available at: <https://humanrightsforkids.org/publication/disposable-children-the-prevalence-of-child-abuse-and-trauma-among-children-prosecuted-as-adults-in-maryland-2/>

² The mission of the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services is “to transform young people’s lives, create safer communities, and forge more equitable systems through community-based partnerships that hold youth accountable while building on their strengths and support systems.” Available at: <https://djs.maryland.gov/Pages/about-us/About.aspx>

DJS Hardware Secure Detention

Short-term, pre-disposition/pending placement:

- Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center (BCJJC)
- Cheltenham Youth Detention Center (CYDC)
- Charles H. Hickey, Jr., School (Hickey)
- Western Maryland Children's Center (WMCC)
- Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center (LESCC)
- Charles H. Hickey, Jr., Shelter (staff secure)

DJS Committed Placement

Long-term, post-disposition:

- Victor Cullen Center (Cullen)
- PEACE Academy for Girls (at WMCC)
- Backbone Mountain Youth Center
- Green Ridge Youth Center

Incident and Population Trends

2024 annual population and incident trends versus 2023:

- ❖ The population of incarcerated youth in DJS facilities grew during calendar year 2024. The average daily population (ADP) of youth rose in all DJS-operated secure detention centers except for LESCC. The average youth population also increased at the Victor Cullen placement center and fell slightly (by 1 youth) at the combined youth centers.
- ❖ Youth-on-youth fights and assaults in secure detention centers increased at BCJJC, CYDC (Cheltenham) and WMCC but decreased at Hickey and LESCC. Fights and assaults increased in committed placement at the youth centers but decreased at Victor Cullen.
- ❖ Physical restraints of youth by staff increased at all DJS-operated secure detention centers apart from LESCC. Staff use of physical restraints on youth also increased in committed placement at the youth centers: at Green Ridge Youth Center, there were 414 instances during 2024, and at Backbone Mountain Youth Center, there were 223 instances.
- ❖ The use of mechanical restraints (handcuffs and/or leg irons) on youth inside secure detention facilities decreased at BCJJC but increased at WMCC and Hickey. Mechanical restraint usage increased in committed placement at Cullen and at the youth centers.
- ❖ Reported incidents of seclusion decreased in committed placement at Victor Cullen but increased at the youth centers. Seclusion decreased at BCJJC, Hickey and LESCC secure detention centers but increased at CYDC and WMCC. CYDC had the highest rate of seclusion of any DJS-operated facility. During 2024, there were 169 reported instances of seclusion at CYDC (compared to 54 at Hickey - a similarly sized detention facility to CYDC).
- ❖ There were nine reports of suicide attempts and 177 reports involving suicide ideation from DJS-operated facilities in 2024. WMCC accounted for six of the nine suicide attempts. There were 32 reports of self-injurious behavior from DJS-operated facilities during 2024.

FACILITY TRENDS

FACILITY TRENDS

The following recommendations stem from ongoing issues identified throughout 2024 facility monitoring visits.

Prioritize staff retention and staff morale.

Low staff morale and staffing shortages are chronic issues across DJS facilities. While staff vacancies have been reduced across the system, staff not showing up for work or out of work on injury leave puts a strain on facility operations and on dedicated staff members who consistently report for duty and are often required to work double shifts every week to make up for staff availability problems. Staffing issues are especially dire at CYDC and WMCC and youth at those facilities were regularly placed in de facto seclusion and kids were routinely held in their living units during mealtimes, during the school day, and on weekends because there were not enough staff to stay in ratio during youth movement within the facility. Additionally, administrators at WMCC and CYDC struggled to consistently report incidents in a timely manner (as required by DJS policy).

JJMU Recommendations:

- Make positive employee engagement and well-being a headquarters-level priority.
- Provide resources and supports for staff including resources to help cope with vicarious trauma and mitigate burnout.
- Provide for expanded staff input in decision-making at the facility level.
- Promote staff accountability by monitoring and addressing staff attendance rates.
- Explore alternative staffing models such as changes in shift times/duration to discourage callouts and/or use part-time workers to supplement facility staffing.

Improve the plight of girls in the deep end of the system.

The needs of girls in the deep (carceral) end of the juvenile justice system continue to be overlooked. There is no regionally located detention center for girls. Although a substantial majority of securely detained girls come from the Baltimore or DC-metro region, they are housed in the Western Maryland Children's Center, located in Hagerstown. Conditions at WMCC have been unstable since the conversion from an all-male to an all-female facility in October of 2023. The facility routinely operates with bare bones staffing levels that contribute to a reduction in safety, security, and programming.

During 2024, some detained girls were sent to the Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center. Although also remotely located (in Salisbury, on Maryland's eastern shore), LESCC has a positive culture and experienced leadership. More mechanisms are needed at both LESCC and WMCC for increased family engagement (such as consistently providing video calls to all girls out of jurisdiction so that they can maintain family and community ties).

The State of Maryland also lacks a staff secure placement site for girls and the only DJS-operated hardware secure placement for girls consists of a pod within the WMCC detention center.

JJMU Recommendations:

- Devote resources and enlist professional expertise to transform the culture and climate at WMCC (where most girls are incarcerated).
- Move incarcerated girls closer to their communities and families and increase family engagement opportunities to facilitate visitation and community contact.
- Expand community-based and specialized placement opportunities for girls.

Improve under-performing placement sites and use the high-functioning pending placement units at regionally located detention centers (BCJJC and CYDC) as a model for future placement options.

Green Ridge Youth Center, a placement facility in far western Maryland, continues to struggle with daily operations. Many direct care staff have less than two years' experience and are not provided with sufficiently relevant training or effective mentoring to help them develop cultural competency, build rapport, establish safety and structure, and offer support to incarcerated young people. Youth/staff relationships are frequently conflictual and antagonistic, and staff are often frustrated at the lack of support or guidance from facility leadership and supervisors. Staff accountability is also lacking, leading to the perpetuation of staff behaviors that undermine safety and contribute to instability.

Selected Incident Categories	Green Ridge 2024	Backbone 2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	27	26
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	107	62
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	46	29
3. Physical Restraint	414	223
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	66	41
7. Suicide Ideation	93	18

The chart above shows similar population numbers but stark differences in incident rates for selected at Green Ridge compared to Backbone during calendar year 2024.

JJMU Recommendation:

- The Department should scrutinize conditions at Green Ridge and provide experienced and effective leadership at the site to help improve conditions.

The Department created pending placements units within BCJJC and CYDC detention centers where young people can begin to receive treatment services while they wait for an opportunity to move to a committed placement site. The pending placement program has been highly successful in engaging young people, their families, and community partners in its operation and the program continues to be evaluated and improved upon. Most young people who begin their treatment on pending placement at a DJS detention center and subsequently are moved to a DJS placement center request to return to pending placement in detention centers to receive all their treatment services there. The reasons youth give for such requests include receiving better care, having increased connection and contact with loved ones, and having access to more robust and meaningful opportunities for engagement through activities and programming in pending placement at BCJJC and CYDC than in any of the placement sites in western Maryland.

JJMU Recommendation:

While DJS placement centers are in remote areas, facilities closer to youth families and communities are better able to leverage critical family and community support. When evaluating placement options, the Department should learn from the promising reports indicating positive youth engagement from culturally responsive care on the pending placement units at BCJJC and CYDC and replicate and improve the model.

Get back to the basics.

Across the system, facilities struggle to consistently provide access to appropriate clothing and hygiene items, adequate food portions, functional phone services, and a variety of structured programming and leisure options.

Young people must have basic living needs taken care of, including access to adequate food portions, appropriate clothing and hygiene items, responsive medical care, clean and safe living conditions, a sense of belonging and connection, and opportunities to grow and learn. When these needs are met, anxiety lessens, and youth are more likely to engage in treatment and less likely to act out.

JJMU Recommendation:

- Create a quality-of-life designee at each facility to ensure basic needs are met.
- Hold leadership responsible if youth are deprived of basic needs and for any failure to ensure earned items are available and delivered on time.
- Give youth a voice in decisions regarding quality-of-life issues to foster positive youth development.

DETENTION CENTERS

Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center

The Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center (BCJJC) is a hardware secure (maximum-security) detention center for boys, owned and operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). The DJS-rated housing capacity is 120 youth. Black youth represented 89% of the entries to BCJJC in the 2023 and 2024 calendar years. Hispanic/Latino youth comprised 4% of entries in 2024.

BCJJC – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	63	79	95
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	202	293	326
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	19	17	24
3. Physical Restraint	226	192	258
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	62	29	25
5. Seclusion	79	20	14
6. Contraband	23	15	32
7. Suicide Ideation	24	14	10
8. Suicide Attempt	2	0	1
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	8	0	0

The number of young people held at BCJJC (and throughout the system at DJS-operated facilities) continues to increase. The average daily population at BCJJC increased by 20% in 2024, compared to 2023. The number of children and young people charged as adults as a proportion of the BCJJC population also continues to be high and now represents the majority of the detained population. In BCJJC during December of 2024, for example, the average daily population of children and young people charged as

adults was 59 compared with 36 charged as juveniles. This situation represents a huge increase in proportion over the past couple of years.

The vast majority of youth charged as adults do not end up in the adult carceral system and many are eventually transferred to the juvenile system, yet they are all forced to spend months or even a year or more on dead time (without individualized help or treatment or time counting) in secure detention centers while they wait for a court decision and a possible transfer to the juvenile system when they can begin receiving targeted and in-depth treatment and rehabilitative services to meet their needs.

When comparing the occurrence of incidents in calendar year 2024 with 2023, youth on youth aggression, physical restraints of youth by staff, and instances of contraband increased at BCJJC. However, use of seclusion and use of mechanical restraints (handcuffs and/or leg irons) on youth inside the facility decreased.

BCJJC was under the direction of an experienced superintendent for most of the reporting period (he resigned in November of 2024). The delivery of basic provisions and services for youth was negatively affected and physical plant conditions deteriorated toward the end of the fourth quarter of 2024 following his departure and prior to the appointment of a new head administrator.

Basic Needs: Hygiene and Clothing

During the fourth quarter of 2024, youth faced delays in receiving replacement inventory for torn and worn-out clothing and shoes, and many young people complained that soap is heavily rationed and runs out completely before replacement is permitted.

Basic Needs: Living Conditions

Physical plant concerns were prominent throughout the fourth quarter of 2024. The monitor observed dirty living units (including bathrooms) with obscene graffiti on the walls, gnats inside toilets, lack of usable cleaning supplies such as clean rags to use on living units, and broken GTL phones (which are used by young people to make calls to loved ones and legal representatives) that were not repaired for extended periods of time.

Basic Needs: Food and Water

During the fourth quarter, there were delays in getting fresh drinking water on the units and both staff and youth reported that cups used to access the water were frequently out of stock and inventory was not replaced in a timely way.

Young people across most DJS-operated facilities have commented on a decline in food quality and a decrease in the daily quantity of food given to youth since the summer of 2024. Youth say they are frequently hungry, and that the amount of food provided for breakfast and lunch is inadequate. Additionally, access to juice and condiments with meals is strictly limited until dinner time.

Services: Religious Services, Leisure Time Activities

Muslim youth suffered delays in receiving religious items (kufis) despite repeated requests from youth and the monitor. Muslim youth have also asked for consistently held in-person services and religious instruction – these resources are available to youth practicing some other religions.

The Department provides youth with MP3 players for use during downtime to cope with boredom, however several youth reported delays in receiving MP3 players. Access to working in the music studio - a popular activity among youth - was also limited because of broken equipment.

Services: Medical

Young people reported problems related to treatment and to the medical unit. A youth with a rash who placed a sick call was not seen in a timely fashion and only received medical attention after the monitor expressed concern. Two other young people reported food allergies to medical personnel, but the allergy information was not transmitted to dietary staff by the nursing staff. The young people in question subsequently suffered allergic reactions after being served inappropriate food content.

Facility Safety: Contraband

Stemming the flow of contraband remains a challenge. There were several incidents where contraband (suboxone strips, vape pens, smart devices) was found inside the facility (Incidents 181415, 181235, 181208, 180964, and 180730). In Incident 180875, a youth was observed nodding off and reported to staff that he was “high”.

Staff/Youth Relationships

While there are positive relationships between many of the staff and young people at BCJCC, youth have reported that there are some staff who take out frustration about work-related problems (extended overtime, working extra shifts several days each week) on youth. These staffers utilize the behavior management program (the means by which young people earn points and incentives) in a way that is punitive toward youth rather than to reinforce constructive behaviors. A focus on power and control rather than on rapport and relationship-building is counterproductive as it undermines rather than strengthens positive influence on the behavior and mindset of young people.

Services: Activities and Events

DJS staff are to be commended for planning and offering activities and programming for the young people at BCJJC during breaks and in the holiday season, including well-attended family engagement events. Staff also successfully operate a hair care incentive program. The young people in the pending placement units enjoyed multiple activities throughout the fourth quarter of 2024 and the youth on those units also welcomed new furniture and bedding that helps efforts to foster a more home-like feel in

their living area. Additionally, at BCJJC, a post-high school work program for students who have graduated started in August of 2024.

New Leadership: Addressing Climate and Culture

At time of writing (January of 2024), there is a newly hired superintendent at BCJJC that will be responsible for restoring and building upon the positive culture that was beginning to be developed at BCJJC under the previous superintendent. For facility reform to continue, leadership will need to address the basic needs of youth, promote staff professionalism, and ensure young people are receiving quality services at BCJJC.

Education Services

There were teacher vacancies in Physical Education, Math and Special Education, however a Media teacher and Science teacher were hired into the BCJJC school during December of 2024.

School staff operate after-school clubs for students including an initiative that incorporates a Baltimore-based community mentorship program which provides activities and support for young people inside BCJJC.

Cheltenham Youth Detention Center

Cheltenham Youth Detention Center (CYDC), located in Prince George's County, is a hardware secure (locked and fenced) detention center owned and operated by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). The DJS-rated housing capacity is 72 young people. Black youth represented 77% of total youth entries in 2024, compared to 73% in 2023. Hispanic/Latino youth represented 15% of entries in 2024, compared to 16% in 2023.

CYDC– Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	41	65	68
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	105	231	258
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	20	46	37
3. Physical Restraint	179	288	319
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	20	32	32
5. Seclusion	72	95	169
6. Contraband	17	95	28
7. Suicide Ideation	19	25	7
8. Suicide Attempt	0	0	1
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	44	25	15

The number of young people held at Cheltenham (and throughout the system at DJS-operated facilities) continues to increase. Youth charged as adults make up nearly half of the population at CYDC. During December of 2024, for example, the average daily population of youth charged as adults was 33 compared with 34 charged as juveniles. This represents a huge increase in proportion over the past couple of years.

The vast majority of youth charged as adults do not end up in the adult carceral system and many are eventually transferred to the juvenile system, yet they are all forced to spend months or even a year or more on dead time (without individualized help or treatment or time counting) in secure detention centers while they wait for a court decision and a possible transfer to the juvenile system when they can begin receiving targeted and in-depth treatment and rehabilitative services to meet their needs.

Incidents and Staffing

There was a huge increase in the number of reported seclusions of youth by staff and administrators at CYDC in 2024 versus 2023, and yet the average daily population only marginally increased. This untoward growth is more alarming when combined with de facto seclusions when staff shortages lead to youth relegation to cells – these situations that are driven by inadequate staff to youth ratios are not documented as seclusions. Additionally, there have been youth complaints about unreported or unsanctioned seclusions when some staff unilaterally decide to punish young people for minor infractions by restricting them to their cells. The numbers of fights/assaults as well as physical restraints of youth by staff also increased at CYDC in 2024 compared to 2023.

Lack of staff availability to work in shift coverage is a chronic issue (especially on weekends), and this makes maintaining safety more difficult and makes it extremely hard to offer appropriate levels of activities and programming for youth outside of school hours. Administrators as well as other supervisors should make themselves available to help with direct youth supervision duties, whenever needed.

Serious Youth Injuries

The occurrence of incidents involving serious youth injuries remained a concern at CYDC throughout the year and into the fourth quarter of 2024.

In Incident 181396, a youth had to have hand surgery and parts of several fingers were amputated after a staffer forcefully kicked a cell door closed as the youth was grabbing the door. The staffer no longer works at the facility.

In incident 179914, a youth was assaulted by another youth and the victim can be seen on video walking away from the incident holding his mouth. The youth was seen by medical immediately following the incident and complained of severe pain (“10 out of 10” on a pain scale) - including tooth pain - according to a medical evaluation performed by a nurse at the facility. He was prescribed Tylenol and an ice pack and placed on a soft food diet. The youth reported to the monitor that he was in severe pain throughout the weekend and also gave a statement to DJS investigators regarding this incident:

“I told the nurse I was feeling pain in my jaw that day. I told them to take me to the hospital and they didn’t take me to the hospital when I knew something was wrong. I said my teeth was also hurting but that wasn’t the only thing. When I said my jaw was hurting, they said they can’t do nothing about it and that it wasn’t anything serious.”

The youth was not sent off grounds for medical care for further evaluation and potential treatment until two days after the incident when he was found to have suffered a broken jaw that required surgical intervention. In discussing his experience with medical care at CYDC, he reported to the DJS investigator, “I was in pain. I felt disappointed and sad. I felt mistreated like they didn’t really care about me for them to just ignore me.”

In Incident 180793, another youth at CYDC suffered a fractured jaw requiring surgery following an assault by a peer.

Basic Needs

Inventory and basic needs of youth were not provided or taken care of on a timely basis at CYDC throughout 2024. In addition, reinforcement rewards (commissary items earned by youth based on behavioral program compliance) were routinely not provided on schedule and the ongoing failure undermined the efficacy of and discouraged positive youth participation in the incentive program.

Activities and Programming

In grievance 191145, a youth wrote about the lack of activities at CYDC, stating that, “we have the PS5 but no games or movies for the PS5. And we have monthly activities posted up [on the wall], but we don’t do them.” Another youth commented: “we have monthly activities posted on a calendar on the unit [such as] flag football, pickleball, agility training but we never do any of these things so why advertise it?” Administrators must ensure programming and activity schedules are being followed.

Management at Cheltenham has made meaningful and fruitful efforts at community engagement and CYDC has a very active facility advisory board made up of community volunteers who plan and carry out events for the young people incarcerated there. However, the fenced field, located at the back of the facility, remains underutilized while young people at CYDC frequently ask for more opportunities to access the field for basic recreational needs, and for football, track, and outside exercise equipment utilization.

Services on the pending placement unit at CYDC (where youth preparing to go to a treatment facility are held) continue to improve. Young people report they would rather complete their placement time at Cheltenham instead of at the remotely located DJS placement centers because they receive better care and services, have increased access to family and other supports, and are provided with more opportunities to engage in meaningful activities and programming than when they are in DJS placement centers.

New Leadership

At time of writing (January of 2024), the superintendent in place throughout 2024 has been replaced and an acting superintendent with a demonstrated track record of effectiveness and responsiveness to youth and staff needs has been assigned to CYDC. He has been tasked with improving safety and services for young people at CYDC (including addressing the youth concerns outlined in this facility report).

Charles H. Hickey, Jr., School

The Charles H. Hickey, Jr., School (Hickey) in Baltimore County, is a hardware secure (locked and fenced) detention center for boys. Hickey is owned and operated by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) and has a DJS-rated housing capacity of 72 youth. Black youth accounted for 77% of entries in 2024, a decrease compared to 84% in 2023. Hispanic/Latino accounted for 10% of entries in 2024.

Hickey – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	49	60	69
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	162	197	192
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	11	1	10
3. Physical Restraint	170	232	288
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	37	29	38
5. Seclusion	49	58	54
6. Contraband	7	23	21
7. Suicide Ideation	5	8	14
8. Suicide Attempt	0	0	0
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	5	0	1

The incarcerated youth population continues to increase throughout the deep end of the Maryland juvenile justice system. The average daily population of youth in Hickey increased by 15% in calendar year 2024 compared to 2023. Further comparing the two time periods, physical restraints of youth by staff increased by 24%, use of mechanical restraints (handcuffs and/or leg irons) increased by 31%, and instances of suicide ideation also substantially increased. However, incidents involving youth-on-youth aggression and reported use of seclusion decreased.

An overwhelming majority of the Hickey population are young people who have been charged as adults in Baltimore County. At Hickey during December of 2024, for example, the average daily population of youth charged as adults was 51 compared with 15 charged as juveniles.

The vast majority of youth charged as adults do not end up in the adult carceral system and many are eventually transferred to the juvenile system, yet they are all forced to spend months or even a year or more on dead time (without individualized help or treatment or time counting) in secure detention centers while they wait for a court decision and a possible transfer to the juvenile system when they can begin receiving targeted and in-depth treatment and rehabilitative services to meet their needs.

Programming

Administrators, supervisors, recreation and direct staff at Hickey excel at devising and providing constructive and meaningful activities for young people including the following:

- A local animal caretaker brings in snakes and other animals to teach young people about wildlife
- Events for Hispanic Heritage Month
- Game and movie nights
- Cookies and canvas (painting) activity
- Supervised weightlifting classes and basketball clinic
- Incentive-based hair braiding program
- Paid work program within the facility (called YOLO) for young people with high school diplomas. During the fourth quarter of 2024, there were three young people enrolled in the facility YOLO program.

Family Engagement

Administrators at Hickey prioritize family engagement and are responsive to youth and family requests for contact. Young people incarcerated at Hickey (located in Baltimore County) but whose families live in other parts of the state can request virtual visits if the family has transportation issues. Young people with children can have one visit per month with their child. During the holiday period at the end of 2024, there were seasonal parties held for young people and their family members.

Interpretation Services

Several young people with limited English language skills were not provided with interpreters or had interpreters who frequently left early leaving youth without the ability to communicate verbally with staff and peers. Interpreter services should be delivered by a reliable and consistent provider available to meet youth needs.

Food Services

The Department should re-evaluate food services throughout DJS facilities and ensure that young people are provided with nourishing, filling, and tasty meals. Youth report being hungry for much of the day at Hickey (and at other detention and placement DJS facilities) because of small portion sizes and strict calorie counting enforcement to comply with federal and state school system mandates.

In addition, the following findings resulted from a monitoring visit to the Hickey facility kitchen during the fourth quarter of 2024:

- Expired food
- Bugs in oatmeal
- Improper labeling and storing of food
- Lack of food logs

Education Services

There were vacancies for a math, social studies, and science teachers as well as for a guidance counselor at Hickey during the fourth quarter of 2024.

The Hickey Shelter

There is a shelter care program for boys and girls on Hickey facility grounds (outside the fence of the detention component) which began operating in 2022. The shelter is overseen by administrators from the detention center and direct-care staff from the detention facility supervise the youth in the shelter.

There is a plentiful supply of food and other necessities at the shelter and DJS direct-care staff provide caring support to the young people placed there. However, there is a need for training to help some staff be less corrections-orientated in their approach.

The young people in the shelter sometimes use air fryers and other small kitchen appliances under staff supervision. The young people there said that they would like to do more, including assisting with food service tasks and in the preparation of their own meals. There are plans for the youth in the shelter to take part in a basic food hygiene program called ServSafe, but that idea has not been effectuated yet.

There is a DJS activities coordinator for the shelter, however activities ground to a halt during the winter months. There have also been ongoing delays in getting kids enrolled in local schools which results in students spending all day at the shelter with little to do to occupy themselves.

While the availability of planned activities is inconsistent, shelter care staff do make daily efforts to keep kids engaged through art projects, games, and unit activities. Staff also organized holiday season meals for kids during the fourth quarter of 2024.

Recommendations regarding shelter care:

- The Department needs to continue to provide regular (non-prison type) clothing for young people in the shelter at no cost to youth or their families. There should be planned family engagement-related events and activities (both on- and off-grounds) throughout the year for the boys and girls who are housed in the shelter.

- Clinical staff and case management staff working with the young people in the shelter should receive enhanced training in helping to care for high-needs youth and should also take a more active role in establishing and maintaining a therapeutic milieu. The girls and young women at the shelter should have access to a female therapist and to on- and off-site access for services related to hair care and alternative hairstyles.

Thomas J.S. Waxter Children's Center

The Thomas J.S. Waxter Children's Center (Waxter) in Anne Arundel County was a hardware secure (locked and fenced) detention center for girls. Waxter was operated by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) and had a DJS-rated housing capacity of 32 girls.

The facility (which closed in March of 2022) was aged, cramped and in disrepair. The Department refurbished the Noyes secure detention center in Montgomery County to serve as an all-girls detention facility. Noyes was also an old facility, but the physical plant was in better condition than the wholly decrepit Waxter center. Girls at Waxter were transferred to Noyes in March of 2022.

In April of 2022, an air conditioner handler unit caught fire at the Noyes facility and the girls were relocated to a unit at the DJS detention center for boys at Cheltenham (CYDC), in Prince George's County, until repairs could be made to the Noyes AC unit. The girls were transported back to the Noyes facility in Rockville during June of 2022.

In mid-October of 2022, the Noyes facility for girls was closed again and detained girls and young women awaiting adjudication (as well as multiple staff from Noyes) were again transferred to the detention center for boys in Cheltenham, this time as part of a belated measure to bolster critically low staffing levels at the Cheltenham facility.

Detained girls remained at CYDC until October of 2023, when they were moved to the Western Maryland Children's Center (WMCC) located in Hagerstown, Maryland. When capacity is reached at that facility, newly detained girls are taken to Lower Eastern Shore Detention Center in Salisbury. At time of writing (January of 2025), WMCC houses girls and young women in placement and pending placement status, as well as those in detention and a section of the LESCC facility in Salisbury is also currently being utilized to cope with the increasing number of girls and young women who are being incarcerated in Maryland.

Girls and young women in the juvenile justice system have different medical, reproductive health, mental health, and trauma-related needs than boys. They deserve adequate space, targeted services and a setting tailored to meet their circumstances.

Alfred D. Noyes Children's Center

The Alfred D. Noyes Children's Center, located in Montgomery County, was a Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) owned and operated maximum security detention center with a DJS-rated population capacity of 29.

Noyes was temporarily closed in early December of 2021, and boys and girls then housed at Noyes were moved to other DJS detention centers. DJS converted the facility to an all-girls detention center, and girls who would have been housed at the all-girls Waxter detention center in Laurel (which had an aged and deteriorating physical plant) were moved to Noyes on March 1, 2022. Due to both facility conditions at Noyes and staffing issues at the Cheltenham facility, detained girls were displaced several times throughout 2022.

In April of 2022, an air conditioner handler unit caught fire at the Noyes facility and girls were relocated and housed on one unit at Cheltenham Youth Detention Center (CYDC) for boys until repairs could be made to the Noyes AC unit. The girls and young women were transported back to the Noyes facility in June of 2022.

In mid-October of 2022, the Noyes facility was again temporarily shuttered and detained girls and young women awaiting adjudication and many of the staffers from Noyes were transferred to Cheltenham (as part of a belated effort to boost CYDC staffing).

Detained girls remained at CYDC until October of 2023, when they were moved to Western Maryland Children's Center (WMCC) located in Hagerstown, Maryland. When capacity is reached at that facility, newly detained girls are taken to Lower Eastern Shore Detention Center in Salisbury. At time of writing (January of 2025), the number of girls incarcerated in Maryland is continuing to increase and WMCC is housing girls and young women in placement and pending placement status as well as those in detention and there are detained girls being held in Salisbury as well.

The facility at Noyes was staffed by people experienced in working constructively and empathetically with detained girls and young women. The physical plant consisted of several living units, a separate school area, and outdoor space which allowed staff to more constructively manage group dynamics. The location of Noyes in Rockville, Montgomery County, enabled DJS and the education administration at Noyes to leverage extensive local resources to benefit both youth and staff, and the results included enhanced education services for incarcerated youth.

Girls in the juvenile justice system have different medical, reproductive health, mental health, and trauma-related needs than boys. If the state continues to incarcerate girls³, they deserve adequate space, services and a setting that is tailored to meet their circumstances.

³ Some states and jurisdictions have committed to ending the incarceration of girls by devoting resources to community-based interventions, supports, and programs that can better serve the needs of young people. See Dholakia, Nazish and Rosenthal, Lindsay (October 4, 2022), "Hawai'i is so Close to Ending the Incarceration of Young Girls, Vera Institute of Justice, available at: [Hawai'i Is So Close to Ending the](#)

Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center

The Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center (LESCC) is a hardware secure detention center located in Salisbury. LESCC is owned and operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) and has a DJS-rated housing capacity of 24 youth. Black youth accounted for 82% of entries during calendar year 2024.

LESCC – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	18	19	19
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	49	82	42
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	11	14	14
3. Physical Restraint	170	143	109
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	2	5	5
5. Seclusion	18	10	2
6. Contraband	8	7	2
7. Suicide Ideation	25	6	14
8. Suicide Attempt	0	0	1
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	3	2	5

While the average daily youth population at LESCC was unchanged in calendar year 2024 compared to 2023, incident numbers were substantially down.

[Incarceration of Young Girls | Vera Institute](https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/reducing-jail-and-prison-population/ending-girls-incarceration-initiative#:~:text=Vera's%20Initiative%20to%20End%20Girls,juvenile%20legal%20system%20by%202030). See also the Vera's Initiative to End Girls' Incarceration, available at: <https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/reducing-jail-and-prison-population/ending-girls-incarceration-initiative#:~:text=Vera's%20Initiative%20to%20End%20Girls,juvenile%20legal%20system%20by%202030>.

In addition to detained boys and girls from Maryland's eastern shore, LESCC currently houses some detained girls from elsewhere in the state [most detained girls and young women are held at WMCC, in Hagerstown].

The number of youth at LESCC who have been charged as adults as a proportion of the overall facility population continues to climb, and the effects of this upward trajectory in driving young people into the criminal justice system are noticeable throughout the DJS-operated detention system. At LESCC during December of 2024, the average daily population of youth charged as adults was 13, compared to 6 charged as juveniles.

While most youth who are charged as adults do not end up in the adult carceral system (many are eventually transferred to the juvenile system), they are all forced to spend months or even a year or more on dead time (without individualized help or treatment or time counting) in secure detention centers. They await a criminal court decision and the possibility of moving to the juvenile system when they can begin receiving targeted and in-depth treatment and rehabilitative services to meet their needs.

LESCC continues to benefit from experienced and capable leadership that promotes a stable facility environment responsive to youth needs. Staff work to minimize the use of potentially traumatizing practices such as seclusion and mechanical restraints (handcuffs and/or leg irons) on the young people held there.

Excessive Use of Force

A staffer lifted a youth off the ground and slammed him to the floor during a restraint (incident 180449). The youth landed on his left shoulder, head and neck area. He lay on the floor for several minutes and could be observed convulsing. Nursing staff arrived and the youth was eventually brought to medical for examination. The nursing report indicates he was crying and in pain, and he did not remember what happened, however staff informed medical that the youth hit his head on the floor during a restraint. Even so, the youth was not seen for an off-grounds medical evaluation until two days after the incident, when it was discovered that he had suffered a fractured vertebrae in his neck that, fortunately, would not require surgery. The staffer involved no longer works at DJS.

The facility implemented changes in response to the (above) incident, including:

- Training for direct-care staff and medical staff in accurately reporting and appropriately responding to possible head and neck injuries involving young people and also in identifying and reporting to facility administrators without delay on situations involving possible excessive use of force by staff.
- Allowing nursing staff to review footage of incidents so that they are better able to describe situations involving possible injury to the on-call doctors who then determine if youth need to be sent off-grounds for further medical evaluation.

Western Maryland Children's Center

Western Maryland Children's Center (WMCC) in Washington County, is a 24-bed maximum security detention and placement center for girls and young women which is owned and operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). Black youth represented 74% of youth entries to WMCC in both 2024 and 2023. Hispanic/Latina youth accounted for 7% of total youth entries in both 2024 and 2023. There are three living units – a 12-cell unit and two six-cell units. WMCC has very limited outdoor and classroom space and limited office space for mental health professionals and other staff.

WMCC – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023 ⁴	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	15	16	21
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	41	57	78
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	13	8	28
3. Physical Restraint	149	140	256
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	35	38	57
5. Seclusion	26	17	39
6. Contraband	3	3	7
7. Suicide Ideation	10	9	17
8. Suicide Attempt	0	0	6
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	1	5	9

While securely detained male youth are usually held in DJS-operated facilities in or near their home communities, there are no regionally based detention and placement centers for girls and so these youth are held far from their families and communities. Additionally, WMCC is the only DJS facility housing both youth in placement (treatment) status as well as youth in detention status.

⁴ WMCC was an all-boys detention center until late October of 2023. On October 23, 2023, the Department changed WMCC to an all-girls facility.

The young people incarcerated at WMCC want (and need) more opportunities for family engagement (including virtual as well as in-person visits) - this is an especially important issue as most incarcerated girls held at WMCC are located far from loved ones and their communities.

During 2024 (and up to the time of writing in January of 2025), Western Maryland Children's Center remained a chaotic, unstructured, and conflict-ridden environment for the girls and staff alike. Despite its smaller population size, WMCC had the highest rate of incidents in 2024 of any DJS-operated detention center, and both staff and youth continue to report feeling unsafe.

Young people report strained youth/staff relationships and unprofessional staff conduct and conveyed that there were frequent occurrences of staff cursing at them, calling them derogatory names, and threatening them. Young people also report that they are often placed in their cells when there are not enough staff to work the units, and these reports have been corroborated by the monitor during unannounced weekend visits to the facility. This practice of inappropriate confinement is de facto seclusion, but it is not documented as such and the protective protocols that accompany formal seclusions to safeguard youth wellbeing are not instituted. The girls also continuously requested more activities to help keep them constructively engaged, however facility leadership frequently cites a lack of available staff as a barrier preventing the provision of programming.

The facility is plagued by low staff morale, high numbers of staff out on injury leave, and chronic staff absenteeism and shortages (especially among supervisory staff) resulting in critically low staffing numbers available for direct-care shift work at the facility. During 2024, leadership at the facility was inconsistent in enforcing security and programming policies among staff and this failure jeopardized safety and undermined any ability to develop a cohesive team. The resultant dangerous conditions and the negative experiences of the girls and staff at WMCC have been discussed by staff and youth during focus groups conducted by DJS and the Department is moving to address the situation.

Girls committed to the Department for placement in the deep end of the juvenile justice system do not receive equitable resource opportunities when compared with the resources available to boys. There is not a DJS-licensed private provider or a DJS-operated staff secure placement for girls in the state while intensive substance abuse treatment options for girls and young women are minimally available. Absent an appropriate placement facility dedicated to the needs of girls, the Department has embedded a hardware secure placement program within the WMCC detention center by designating one of the pods within that facility to serve as a placement/treatment pod.

At time of writing (January of 2024), a new superintendent and new assistant superintendent have been installed at WMCC. The presence of strong, knowledgeable and capable leadership will be critical to transforming operations and the negative climate and culture at WMCC, and emphasis should be placed on establishing structure and safety; providing opportunities (including a robust activity schedule) so that the incarcerated girls and young women have opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

The Department must implement effective conflict resolution, restorative, and healing practices at the facility to foster positive relationships amongst young people and between the young people and staff. Additionally, all staff at WMCC need to undergo intensive and ongoing training and continuous support on how to constructively and effectively work with the youth incarcerated there. This ongoing training needs to include practical guidance in the formation and maintenance of constructive relationships with the girls and young women at WMCC. At the DJS headquarters level, WMCC should be prioritized and receive comprehensive support until staffing levels are stabilized, appropriate training is ongoing, and a much-improved culture and climate is firmly established.

COMMITTED PLACEMENT CENTERS

Victor Cullen Center

The Victor Cullen Center (Cullen), in Frederick County, is a hardware secure (locked and fenced) committed placement center owned and operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). The DJS-rated housing capacity is 27 youth. Black youth represented 81% of total entries in both calendar year 2023 and 2024. Hispanic/Latino youth comprised 9% of youth entries in 2024 compared to 7% the previous year.

Victor Cullen – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	16	23	25
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	28	47	45
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	4	16	26
3. Physical Restraint	38	89	89
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	9	27	31
5. Seclusion	1	13	9
6. Contraband	7	19	22
7. Suicide Ideation	1	9	4
8. Suicide Attempt	0	0	0
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	1	5	2

The average daily population at Cullen and the occurrence of incidents remained at relatively the same level when comparing calendar year 2024 with the year before.

Staff shortages

A shortage of adequate numbers of direct care workers reporting for work to cover shifts at the facility remained a serious concern at Cullen throughout 2024. Young people were not moved from living units to the dining hall or to the on-grounds school on some days during the fourth quarter because there were not enough staffers at the facility to ensure safe movement of youth within the facility. The off-grounds work program for high

school graduates at Cullen was also curtailed at times throughout 2024 whenever there was not a male staffer available to go off-grounds with qualifying youth.

There was a vacancy for a case management supervisor at Cullen during 2024 and young people there reported that case managers were often unavailable to meet their needs. As a result of this service gap, there were several instances when youth court re-entry documents delivery was delayed, treatment hours were not consistently accounted for⁵, and youth were not able to contact their community case manager upon request.

Inventory and Basic Needs

Youth at Cullen reported that issuance of rationed basic needs items including hygiene products and fresh clothing to replace torn, worn-out and soiled items was frequently delayed. Fresh, clean drinking water was not consistently provided for young people as noted during monitoring visits in the fourth quarter of 2024. Youth also reported a lack of cleaning supplies to keep living areas sanitary. Direct care staffers corroborated youth accounts and told the monitor that even they cannot access basic items to give to youth and often pay for cleaning products out-of-pocket to help maintain unit cleanliness.

Dietary Needs

The Department needs to re-evaluate food services throughout DJS facilities to ensure that young people are provided with nourishing, filling and tasty meals. Youth report being hungry for much of the day at Cullen (and other DJS facilities) because of small portion sizes and have also frequently complained about food quality and taste.

Recreation and Leisure Time

There are few off-grounds activities available to youth at Cullen. A select and small number of young people were able to go bowling on one occasion and to the movies twice during the fourth quarter of 2024. Recreation options on-site are limited and young people say that boredom is especially prevalent on weekends when the pastimes available consist of watching TV or playing cards. Access to a small but popular on-grounds music studio where youth compose music is no longer an option, as it is currently not operational. Two staff members have been assigned to develop more engaging programming options for young people in response to the lack of activities, and facility management needs to ensure that this promising arrangement produces results.

Family Engagement

The facility held family engagement holiday events during the fourth quarter of 2024, however they were poorly attended. Given that the location of the facility is far from youth homes and communities, the Department needs to be proactive in providing

⁵ Treatment hours govern assessed progress and are controlling in determining the length of a youth's stay at the facility.

services and resources - including increasing outreach to families and offering transportation assistance - to improve family engagement and participation.

Culture

Young people frequently report that they feel like jail or prison inmates while ostensibly in treatment at Cullen and request to return to pending placement units in DJS detention facilities where they say they received better care and more services and were located closer to their families and to community supports.

A specialized Departmental team has recently begun work aimed at improving the facility culture and practices for youth and staff at Victor Cullen. Emphasis should be placed on creating a positive culture at Cullen by establishing and maintaining a far more therapeutic environment for young people. In the short term the team - working together with facility administrators and staff - must ensure basic needs and services are provided; must increase the variety and availability of programming and activities; and must facilitate more opportunities and allocate more resources for family engagement.

Garrett Children's Center (formerly Savage Mountain Youth Center)

The Garrett Children's Center (GCC/Garrett), located in rural Garrett County, is a Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) owned and operated hardware secure (locked and fenced) committed placement center for boys. The facility has a DJS-rated youth population capacity of 24.

Garrett was fully operational for approximately two years (from December of 2018 to December of 2020) before it closed to youth in 2021, following a widespread COVID-19 outbreak at the facility. Some staff continue to report to the site, including teachers who provide online courses so as to mitigate vacancies for certified teachers in core content areas at other DJS placement and detention facilities around the state.

Youth Centers x2

The youth centers, located in remote western Maryland, consist of two separate staff secure (not fenced and locked) facilities for boys. Both centers are owned and operated by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). The facilities are Green Ridge (30-youth capacity) and Backbone Mountain (28-youth capacity). Black youth represented 82% of total youth entries in calendar year 2024 compared to 81% in 2023. Hispanic/Latino youth represented 9% of entries to the youth centers in 2024 compared to 7% during the previous year.

Combined Youth Centers (x2) – Selected Incident Categories	2022	2023	2024
Average Daily Population (ADP)	43	53	52
1. Youth on Youth Assault/Fight	57	116	169
2. Alleged Youth on Staff Assault	23	37	75
3. Physical Restraint	196	504	637
4. Use of Handcuffs and/or Shackles	34	73	107
5. Seclusion	1	0	4
6. Contraband	14	42	23
7. Suicide Ideation	21	24	111
8. Suicide Attempt	0	1	0
9. Self-Injurious Behavior	1	1	0

THE YOUTH CENTERS

In 2024, there was an average daily population of 27 young people at the Green Ridge facility and 26 at the Backbone facility.

Basic Needs:

Meal portions at DJS-operated detention and placement facilities, including the youth centers, are sparsely seasoned and strictly monitored for calorie count, even down to severely rationing or disallowing youth to use condiments.

The United States Department of Agriculture nutrition standards (that DJS adheres to) are designed to and are ostensibly supposed to ensure that meals are both nutritious and appealing to children and young people, but the guidelines make no allowance for the large number of incarcerated teenagers for whom scarcity and restricted portions of food is a clinical issue. For many incarcerated teenagers, the food allowance is inadequate, and they consistently complain about going hungry.

Young people at the youth centers also complain about the hygiene products they are given. A number of youth state that the soap-based products are of poor quality and cause them to break out in a rash. Youth also say that soap, toothpaste and deodorant rations are too meager to allow them to stay clean and odor free. Young people said that hair care products that address the distinct needs of Black hair are not provided at the youth centers even though youth of color comprise the vast majority of incarcerated young people at those facilities. Several staffers corroborated the assertions made by the young people and agreed with youth on the need for better quality and more culturally appropriate hygiene products and services.

Young people at the youth centers who filed grievances with DJS reported a lack of access to and follow-up by DJS child advocates who can help resolve complaints.

BACKBONE MOUNTAIN YOUTH CENTER

At time of writing (January 2024), Backbone Mountain youth center is under new leadership. The new superintendent is a seasoned DJS administrator with expertise in developing positive relationships with young people. New leadership should continue to maintain the existing stability at Backbone and work to enhance the therapeutic milieu by improving the level of services and care provided to the young people there.

GREEN RIDGE YOUTH CENTER CONCERNS

Green Ridge Youth Center continues to experience operational struggles. In 2024, there were more physical restraints of youth by staff at the Green Ridge youth center (414) than at Backbone Mountain youth center (223), or any other DJS placement or detention facility. Reports of suicide ideation (93) and use of mechanical restraints on young people (66) at Green Ridge were also the highest of any DJS placement or detention center.

Young people at Green Ridge voice ongoing concerns about the facility climate, including the following:

- Conflictual youth/staff relationships
- Lack of staff consistency and displays of favoritism by staff
- Excessive downtime during weekends and after school
- A punitive rather than a supportive environment

Staff at Green Ridge comment that DJS does not provide adequate training, support, mentorship, and oversight for staff to fulfill their job responsibilities. These perceived shortcomings became evident during monitoring visits when staff failed to proactively intervene and de-escalate situations that could have resulted in aggressive incidents and did not conduct adequate searches of youth to help prevent contraband.

Silver Oak Academy

Silver Oak Academy (SOA/Silver Oak), located in Carroll County, is a privately-operated staff secure (not locked and fenced) committed placement center licensed by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department) to house up to 96 boys.

Due to concerns about youth safety, staff supervision issues, and problems within the education department at Silver Oak, all residential youth placed through DJS were removed from the program in May of 2022, and new admissions to the program through DJS were halted.

JUVENILE SERVICES EDUCATION PROGRAM (JSEP)

JUVENILE SERVICES EDUCATION PROGRAM (JSEP)

In mid-2022, education services within all DJS-operated detention and committed placement centers became the responsibility of a statutorily enabled independent school board and superintendent, with the DJS executive administration serving a support role in facilitating access to resources. This independent entity is called the Juvenile Services Education Program (JSEP).⁶

Since taking control of the schools inside DJS' facilities, JSEP administrators and staff have worked to make significant improvements in the delivery of education services for students. Notable accomplishments include the following:

- Developing new curricula to align with state standards of local school systems in order to facilitate more seamless transitions to local schools upon youth release.
- Undertaking an accreditation process for the JSEP program through the Middle States Association Commission on Elementary and Secondary Schools.
- Procuring technical resources to systematize and enhance the delivery of education services including the following:

- Significant upgrades to library collections and the library system

- Implementation of a standardized achievement test to measure academic progress (STAR)

- The purchase of online tutoring and intervention programs to help students with learning gaps and assist students attempting to complete course work

- The purchase of online and virtual training platforms to increase the availability of career and technical education options

- The securing of grants to increase student access to technology: chrome books; tablets; eBooks; audio books; and education-related software focused on student engagement (Google Classrooms, Nearpod, Gizmos).

- Increasing family youth family involvement by: hosting family engagement activities in schools on a quarterly basis; facilitating virtual parent-teacher conferences; providing a parent welcome packet to inform families about school services and parental rights regarding their child's education; and holding student award and graduation ceremonies so that families can gather with youth to celebrate their earned successes.

⁶ Juvenile Services Education Board Website, available at:
<https://djs.maryland.gov/Pages/JSEP/JSEP.aspx>

-Periodically offering enrichment programming through 6-week-long after school clubs (as and when funding permits - held twice to date) and, in conjunction with DJS, through special events involving students from all JSEP schools. Past events have included an oratorical contest, Black and Women's history month events, and STEM-related competitions.⁷

-Promoting access to higher education by forming agreements with nine regional Maryland community colleges and HBCU's to allow high school graduates to take online college courses.⁸ (NOTE: Consistent access to online learning for college students is dependent on facility staff and administrators' ability and commitment to ensuring the provision of student access to computers and course material.)

-According to the latest JSEP annual report, between July 1st, 2023, and June 30th, 2024 (FY 2024), 41 JSEP students earned high school diplomas by passing the GED test. This number represents an increase of approximately 66% over the previous year (FY 2023). Comparing the same two periods, the GED pass rate for JSEP students also increased (from 69% to 82%). A further 25 JSEP students graduated in FY 2024 by fulfilling the graduation requirements of their local school jurisdiction while in DJS custody. This represented a gain of approximately 175% over the previous financial year. The total number of students who gained a high school diploma while attending a JSEP school almost doubled in FY 2024 compared with FY 2023.

Remaining Challenges

JSEP (as a school system) inherited significant challenges, and some issues have not been permanently resolved. Attracting and retaining qualified and dedicated teachers with the ability and experience necessary to work effectively with incarcerated children and young people is an ongoing challenge, particularly at the larger detention centers. Teachers also need to possess or gain the requisite cultural competence and trauma-informed lens necessary to understand and positively impact students. Additionally, public school systems in metropolitan areas offer a higher compensation package to potential educators. Furthermore, although they do receive time off, teachers are required to work year-round in JSEP schools and do not receive the same summer and other school holidays available to teachers in local community schools.

Apart from at two of the placement centers in western Maryland, classes in JSEP school classes are organized by assigned living units rather than youth grade level and therefore students do not receive the same kind of targeted instruction that happens in classes in local public schools. Having students at different grade levels in the same classroom at the same time makes instruction more complicated. Although teachers differentiate content delivery in both JSEP and community schools to encompass different

⁷ See DJS CHAMPS program: <https://djs.maryland.gov/Pages/champs.aspx>

⁸ DJS, through a partnership with Garrett Community College, also has a program that enables high graduates at Backbone Mountain Youth Center to attend community college classes in-person provided that their stay coincides with the academic semester.

learning styles and varying needs, JSEP teachers must additionally construct and deliver multiple lesson plans covering different topics and subject content for each classroom session to accommodate student grade level differences.

Building Upon Current Progress

While JSEP headquarters and facility-based staff continue to make improvements to the existing education system for young people incarcerated in DJS facilities, the system for incarcerated young people has always been closely modeled on a traditional community school approach and high school diploma-track requirements with a strong emphasis on “seat time” and completed hours in core content areas.

Consequently, there is little flexibility in adapting the school day and curriculum to meet the unique needs of and challenges faced by incarcerated students. There should be a greater variety of choices and approaches to education services for young people in DJS custody. Many students in the deep end of the juvenile justice system were previously disengaged from their community schools and want and require more targeted and relevant education programming. These students have identified gaps in the program and voiced a desire for services that encompass the following:

- More emphasis on hands-on and interactive project-based learning
- Consistent opportunities to participate in elective and enrichment courses focused on (for example,) art, physical education, and music
- Opportunities for students interested in and eligible to take the GED to attend GED test preparation courses during the school day so that they can focus on successfully preparing and passing the GED test
- A chance to be involved in practical, real-life training and experience that will lead them to sustainable employment upon release

There is a need for a variety of comprehensive as well as short-term career and technical education courses – courses that lead to certifications in high-demand fields, coupled with work experience and job placement both during incarceration and upon release. Surveys of young people demonstrate keen interest in fields such as barbering, cosmetology, nursing, HVAC, auto mechanics, information technology, carpentry, business (entrepreneurship), culinary arts, construction, and the trucking industry (CDL).

In general, student interest should be considered and acted upon to help guide effective program development. Education-related programming will be enhanced by offering a wider range of opportunities which are individualized and based on the strengths, needs and interests of each student.

There is a proposed initiative in the planning stages at DJS which aims to expand current education offerings in a way that will, if realized, address some of the unmet needs

and concerns of incarcerated students. Under this proposal DJS, working in conjunction with JSEP, will establish a specialized academy (in addition to the current JSEP schools) that is focused on helping young people pass the GED, and on providing intensive and individualized career readiness education and training opportunities.

The project will also involve facilitating connections and support upon release to help young people further their training and/or obtain and sustain productive and steady employment. This new program should be located in or close to the communities that most incarcerated young people hail from and should involve concentrated family engagement efforts. The initiative also needs to be in an area where the Department can leverage forge and sustain a variety of local partnerships so as to bring opportunities and resources, including local employers, to connect with the young people in and graduating from the program.

SMALLER FACILITY UPDATES

SMALLER FACILITY UPDATES

Morning Star Youth Academy

Morning Star Youth Academy (Morning Star) is a staff secure (not locked or fenced) committed placement center on Maryland's eastern shore. The facility is operated by VisionQuest, Inc., and the residential component of the program can accept up to eight youth through DJS, which licenses Morning Star.

In addition to residential services, Morning Star-VisionQuest also operates an on-grounds alternative day school serving students from the surrounding area (Dorchester County). Residential and day students are kept separated on the campus. Dorchester County Public Schools began providing education services to residential students at Morningstar during the fourth quarter of 2024. Students attend virtual classes offered through the local county school system. There are two full-time teachers to assist with the instructional needs of the residential and day students.

Morning Star utilizes a trauma-informed program called Sanctuary. Therapeutic services are also provided onsite, and treatment services are supplemented by clinicians from local community mental health services organizations.

The number of incidents involving aggression at Morning Star remains low and communication between staff and youth is positive and supportive. However, additional guidance and training in supervision and professionalism is needed for some staff. Newer staff in coverage were observed during monitoring visits to be on their phones or having extensive personal conversations with other staffers and were therefore not available to re-direct any negative behavior or to engage proactively with the youth in their care.

Youth at Morning Star have opportunities to participate in more on- and off-site recreational activities than the young people incarcerated at DJS-operated placement facilities. Some youth from Morning Star do volunteer work in the surrounding community and a small number of young people from the facility work in nearby businesses.

Youth at Morning Star partake in outdoor and some indoor physical exercise-related activities. However, the scope of such activities is limited to a degree by the quality of the available resources. The Morning Star physical plant has long needed to be upgraded. The on-site swimming pool which provided a recreational activity during the summer is unusable (absent extensive repairs) and will not be operable in the foreseeable future. Youth are periodically taken to a pool at a nearby recreation facility. There is an onsite weight room, but it does not have air conditioning or heating installed, so the resource cannot be used comfortably during the height of the summer or winter months. There is a covered basketball court but the roof leaks and the floor is slippery and becomes hazardous when condensation is present.

One Love Group Home

One Love Group Home (One Love) is an 8-bed group home in Baltimore City operated by Building Communities Today for Tomorrow, Inc. The home is licensed by and receives referrals from the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS/the Department). The facility began also receiving referrals to house youth involved with the Maryland Department of Human Resources starting in the second quarter of the 2022 calendar year.

Staff and administrators at One Love partner with community-based organizations to provide therapy, education, local employment and enrichment opportunities for youth while they reside in a home-like environment at the group home. Students are enrolled in local community schools where they work toward completing high school. The program is not highly structured and so One Love programming is best suited to mature and self-motivated youth, especially those who are preparing for independent living.

Youth placed at One Love often arrive from DJS placements or detention centers without essential documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, and medical insurance cards that would facilitate their getting employment, enrolling in community programs and accessing health care.

One youth placed at One Love (during the fourth quarter of 2024) was a high school graduate without supportive family members. He was discharged from the Victor Cullen facility, a DJS-operated hardware secure placement center. He arrived at One Love without his social security card and was repeatedly turned down for work because of his lack of documentation. He spent months looking for employment and eventually grew frustrated and became involved in potentially dangerous activity and was subsequently placed in a detention center. The Department must ensure that transition planning includes providing young people with the basic documentation which is vital component for youth as they attempt to successfully re-integrate into community life.

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES – RESPONSE



**DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES
RESPONSE TO THE JJMU 2024 FOURTH QUARTER AND ANNUAL REPORT**

DJS appreciates the opportunity to respond to the feedback shared in JJMU's Fourth Quarter FY '24 Report ("the Report").

The Department of Juvenile Services ("DJS" or "the Department") acknowledges the continued need for improvement raised in the Report and is working to address issues identified by the JJMU and more broadly.

Rather than a point-by-point response and consistent with our recent practice DJS is providing general comments including an update on DJS' work to improve conditions in its residential facilities, as follows:

Residential Services filled several key leadership positions during the final Quarter of 2024, including in treatment and detention facilities as well as behavioral health. With this new capacity DJS has shifted our focus from headquarters-based leadership, to working from facilities weekly. Additional efforts towards cultivating a safe and supportive environment include frequent meetings with youth, line-staff and middle managers, holding focus groups with staff and seeking to implement their ideas on programming, interventions and routine practices that impact their work. DJS is also prioritizing trauma-informed care, ensuring staff receive continuous training to understand and address the diverse needs of our youth, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a structured environment with clear expectations and consistent routines.

Residential Services is also implementing more positive behavior support, regularly recognizing positive actions and facilitating peer mentoring. Community-building activities, including group exercises and collaborative projects, are regularly organized to foster mutual respect.

Updates on Innovation Teams work:

During the final quarter of 2024 the focus remained on delivering staff training at BCJJC and providing technical assistance through our site-based Innovation Team infrastructure at our three Innovation Team sites: Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center (BCJJC), the Western Maryland Children's Center (WMCC), and the Victor Cullen Center (VCC).

Within our multidisciplinary, cross-cutting site-based Innovation Teams, DJS' facility-based project managers continue to manage unique Work Plans built around three focus areas: Culture - building and strengthening a sense of community by improving communication and collaboration and creating opportunities for relationship and trust building; Climate - supporting staff and young people through policy and practice change, where they have a role in crafting the new approach; and Environment - changing the physical space so it is more safe-feeling, comfortable, and humane.

In addition to adding new staff to the team during Q4, through a federal grant from OJJDP, the team selected four grass-root partner organizations through a NOFA (Notice of Funding Availability) process to support the work.

Key facility-based updates:

BCJJC:

"Unit by unit" training for DPod was completed in Q4 and now all four units have participated in the Innovation Team's off-site two-day foundational training. Thus far, this particular training has reached 46 staff resulting in them being more familiar with the goals and purpose of the Innovation Team, and having greater knowledge on topics like positive youth development, restorative justice, cultural healing, and relational safety. Ultimately the goal is for staff to be more prepared to change the culture and climate from their role. Below are some of the responses on the post training evaluation form: This training was...

- "...Very impactful. It helped me to look at certain things... in a different light.
- "... A start of something positively good."
- "... Emotional, informative, therapeutic, helpful, and easy going. Everyone was able to speak and share experiences."
- "...Was a blessing, honest."
- "I feel like the more this training went along the more I saw from other people that was not expected. There was an openness, motivating others, and respecting people's differences."

BCJJC is poised to become the first demonstration site where the team's new operating model will be implemented. Next steps include a reconstitution of the BCJJC's facility-based Innovation Team so it includes more staff and youth from DPod since a critical step for the team will be finalize the new Pod Directive, outlining new policies and practices rooted in the Innovation Team's foundational principles.

WMCC:

After wrapping up the youth focus groups during Q3, staff focus groups were completed during the final quarter, giving way to finalizing the WMCC Work Plan. In mid-December, WMCC Behavioral Health staff and the Innovation Team collaborated to provide “*Frosty Fest*,” an end-of-year celebration for youth and staff. Introducing and modeling restorative practices for staff and youth continues to be a key lever for change at all three of our sites. At WMCC, with support from a philanthropic grant, WMCC has had access to a restorative justice practitioner. In addition to the mural work, other environmental upgrades were a focus for Q4, including repainting the pods and planning for the creation of a “Chill Room” by transforming the time-out room to be a space more rooted in positive youth development. The design of this space was co-designed by youth and staff and is being painted by youth. The procedures and protocol for the “Chill Room” was also co-created by staff and youth. With painting and securing materials to outfit the space underway, the “Chill Room” will be launching shortly. With staff training beginning in Q1 of 2025, implementation of the team’s new operational model will also commence early in 2025.

VCC:

The VCC Work Plan was completed and includes a number of time-bound goals associated with three focus areas: culture, climate and environment. Under the leadership of its new Project Manager, attention has been placed on creating more engagement opportunities for young people. While building trust with facility leadership, a couple of examples of this include starting a weekly community prayer service for Muslim youth and supporting, modeling for, and coaching Resident Advisors as efforts are made to evolve their role to include expectations for providing engaging supervision. In addition to programming, the team prioritized introducing restorative practices and circle work to staff and youth. These circles aim to create a supportive environment where youth and staff can share, reflect, and grow together. Key results of this work include: enhancing communication, promoting accountability, fostering empathy, strengthening relationships, and encouraging personal growth. Finally, increasing staffing stability, while addressing burnout and increasing retention, continues to be a priority as this impacts other implementation strategies.

Behavioral Health:

In partnership with DJS’ contracted provider, Residential Behavioral Health has implemented a multi-faceted strategy to enhance behavioral health services for youth within our facilities. This initiative prioritizes intensive interventions, increased treatment access, and a commitment to data-driven, evidence-based practices.

Expanded Pro-Social Programming and Accelerated Treatment Access:

- After-School Programming: DJS is expanding these initiatives to provide pro-social skill-building and recreational opportunities for youth and staff. This expansion is designed to foster a positive and supportive environment, crucial for behavioral change.

- **Augmented Treatment Hour Delivery:** The Behavioral Health teams at both treatment and pending placement units have committed to delivering after-school programming that allows youth to accrue additional treatment hours. This initiative surpasses the standard 8.5 treatment hours available in pending placement units, ensuring a more intensive and personalized treatment experience.
- **Strategic Treatment Hour Implementation Plan:** An implementation plan is being developed to maximize treatment hour opportunities across committed programs. This plan will integrate programming hours for school engagement and phase promotion, ensuring a holistic and continuous approach to treatment.
- **Revamped Behavioral Management System:** We are undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the behavioral management program to eliminate treatment delays and ensure fidelity and equity in disciplinary responses. This includes the complete removal of "frozen time," promoting a consistent and just system.
- **Enhanced Reboot Program:** The Reboot Program has been redesigned to address the root causes of program ejections. This includes mandatory, regular clinical team meetings with youth to review, discuss, and practice essential skills, maximizing the likelihood of successful treatment completion and preventing recidivism.
- **Aggressive Recruitment and Retention:** DJS is engaged in weekly, high-level meetings with Human Resources to address open positions, implement innovative recruitment strategies, and enhance staff retention. This ensures a stable and highly qualified workforce to deliver effective services.
- **Data-Driven Staff Feedback and Program Refinement:** Over the past three months, Residential Services has conducted targeted focus groups with staff from two committed treatment programs to gather critical feedback, innovative ideas, and suggestions. These sessions also serve as platforms for staff support and exploration of current best practices.
- **Specialized Training for Evaluation Professionals:** We are providing ongoing, specialized training for Psychologists and Psychology Associates conducting evaluations and transfer of jurisdiction evaluations. This training is offered to both internal evaluators and external vendors, in an effort to create consistent, high-quality assessments that inform treatment planning and decision-making.

Residential Services/Detention:

To enhance staff and youth development, residential detention facilities have implemented targeted and multifaceted initiatives. A leadership retreat, attended by facility superintendents, focused on critical professional development, specifically addressing Maryland's return-to-work policy and Injured Workers' Insurance Fund (IWIF) guidelines. This training, delivered by HR

specialists, provided clear documentation and procedural guidance, empowering superintendents to effectively manage employee accident leave and facilitate structured return-to-work plans. The direct result of this focused training has been a measurable increase in successful employee returns, demonstrating the efficacy of prioritizing staff development and well-being.

Simultaneously, a comprehensive approach to youth engagement is being implemented through structured, enriching programs designed to foster personal growth and positive behavior. Activities range from skill-building initiatives, such as “The 80% Club”, which incentivizes positive decision-making and accountability, to creative outlets like on-site music production studios and therapeutic arts, including yoga, dance, and African drumming. Recreational and community-focused programs, such as basketball tournaments, chess clubs, and off-campus excursions through the DJS Reflections program that promote teamwork, strategic thinking, and broader community engagement. These opportunities are intentionally designed to equip youth with the tools and experiences necessary for successful reintegration into their communities, promoting rehabilitation and positive development.

Recognizing the importance of family connections, more enhanced family engagement initiatives were integrated into the youth programming in Residential Detention Services. These initiatives provide opportunities for youth to share special moments with their loved ones during facility-hosted events, fostering and maintaining vital relationships. Festive holiday celebrations and seasonal gatherings were also organized to create meaningful and memorable experiences, ensuring that youth feel supported and connected during their time in care. By combining focused professional development for staff with a robust and diverse program of activities for youth, Residential Detention Services are actively working to create a supportive and rehabilitative environment that benefits staff, families and the young people in our care.

Residential Services/Treatment:

Off-grounds activities have included bowling, swimming, snow tubing, college basketball games, movies and the DC Car Show. Youth engaged in volunteer activities with the United Way and celebrated our Veterans. YOLO programming has expanded to not only state job sites off grounds, but to on grounds with Maintenance and Dietary helping youth achieve Serve Safe certification.

Staff training has been ongoing. There are the routine courses attended for new employees as well as veteran employees. Safe Crisis Management (SCM) training has begun as well as Narcan training and awareness. Most recently, facilities have begun working in conjunction with the Innovation Team to create a more equitable partnership between staff and the young people to collaborate on everything from living spaces to recreational activities/equipment, provide recognition for completion of activities and exceptional endeavors. The group also touches on areas to be addressed, such as Behavior Health, Recreation, Dietary or Education concerns.

Other updates

DJS agrees with JJMU's assertions regarding the importance of bolstering and building community-based services. To that end, the Department is pleased to share the following developments which are a part of its larger Strategic Plan commitment to center community-based programming in all of its work:

- When Secretary Schiraldi joined DJS he conducted a listening tour with staff, youth, families, and prosecutors, judges, and defense attorneys, in every county in the state. He repeatedly heard that the services available to our young people had atrophied badly during the decade prior to 2023; in fact, instead of shoring up the continuum, the Department had returned \$134 million to the general fund - a little more than \$13 million a year. To address that loss, DJs took immediate action, including, but not limited to the following:
 - The agency applied for and received a \$850k federal grant from the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention to support our efforts to rebuild the community service continuum. The grant provides technical assistance from national experts to help us create a comprehensive plan for building our continuum. Most of the funds will be used to conduct a service scan, identify gaps, and create a feedback process for stakeholders regarding community-based service providers. Additional funds will be used to support our girls programming which will be discussed in greater detail below.
 - Simultaneously, DJS established the position of Assistant Secretary for Community Resources. Previously, DJS had a role focused on services, but it was primarily concerned with finding beds rather than building a robust continuum of services. This position is also now an executive leadership role at the agency.
 - DJS has been deeply concerned about the number of our young people who are victims or perpetrators of gun violence - predominantly victims. The agency partnered with the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to help us analyze over 30,000 youth cases referred to DJS over the past three years, identifying key variables that assess a young person's risk of involvement in gun violence discerning what separates the 2% of those youth involved in gun violence from the 98% who were not. Using the analysis, we created The Thrive Academy, an intensive, community-based program to support youth at high risk of gun violence. Each participant is paired with a specialized DJS case manager and a life coach, an individual who has lived experiences similar to those of the youth they serve. The life coach maintains frequent contact with the youth, sometimes multiple times a day, and is

available 24/7 for support, guidance, and violence mediation. Thrive Academy youth are also provided with a “Suitcase of Supports” that is individualized for each youth’s needs and may include: stipended employment with local employers or paid service opportunities, assistance with attending college or vocational training, and many other tools to allow youth to see a path away from their current predicament. Currently, Thrive is operating in Baltimore City and County, and Anne Arundel and Prince George’s Counties, though DJS is expanding Thrive statewide. Early Thrive outcomes are promising - around 2% of Thrive youth have been gun violence victims, none have been homicide victims, and 4 out of 5 have not been arrested for a gun offense. A formal independent evaluation by the University of Pennsylvania is underway.

These are just a few of the many steps we have taken to begin the slow process of rebuilding a neglected service continuum and will keep JJMU apprised of our progress.

Girls Programming Updates

DJS has been diligently working towards improving our strategy around our work with girls, consistent with the critiques raised by JJMU in this report. Specifically, the following developments are underway:

- DJS remains focused on having a provider operate a residential staff secure committed program that would provide a much-needed continuum of care for girls. At the time this is published, DJS expects to have a Statement of Need posted for interested vendors, the first step in the process for vendors to apply who are not currently licensed in Maryland.
- DJS is finalizing subgrantee awards to have a partner (or partners) work with the Innovation Team at the Western Maryland Children’s Center specifically to devise a strategy for working with the specific needs of the girls housed there with a focus on complex trauma. The funds for that work are through a federal grant DJS received from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

DJS is also pleased to share the following incident and population related data, collected by DJS’ Office of Research and Evaluation. Note that DJS believes critical incident rates will improve over time as the work of the agency’s Facility Innovation Teams and other facility reform efforts progress.

The table below presents the past three calendar years of data, showing incident counts and **rates** for detention, committed treatment programs, total state-operated programs, and a breakdown by facility. The table shows all facilities that were open and housing youth during these three years, but it is important to note that several were not open for the full three years.

Calculating the rate of incidents per 100 youth days is a standard method of measuring a rate of incidents, which allows meaningful comparison between facilities of different populations, and changes to a facility population over time.

While it is important to look at trends over longer times, DJS populations and programming often change considerably so it may be more meaningful to compare the current quarter to the one just prior in order to allow for a more direct comparison. Populations are more comparable when looking back one quarter than they would be when looking back two years. For this reason, both timeframes are presented below.

Data and Trends for Three Calendar Years

Key Incident Counts and Rates for the Past Three Calendar Years at DJS Programs

Incident Count	Mechanical Restraints			Physical Restraints			Seclusions			Youth Fights			Yth on Yth Assaults		
	CY 2022	CY 2023	CY 2024	CY 2022	CY 2023	CY 2024	CY 2022	CY 2023	CY 2024	CY 2022	CY 2023	CY 2024	CY 2022	CY 2023	CY 2024
Detention															
Alfred D Noyes Childrens Center*	4	N/A	N/A	32	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.01	N/A	N/A	0.05	N/A	N/A	0.01	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.00	N/A	N/A
Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Ctr Detention	62	29	25	226	192	258	79	17	14	25	63	32	176	231	295
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.09	0.03	0.03	0.32	0.22	0.27	0.11	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.07	0.03	0.25	0.26	0.31
Charles Hickey School	37	29	32	171	233	288	49	58	53	37	40	28	125	157	163
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.24	0.27	0.30	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.18	0.18	0.17
Cheltenham Youth Detention Center	20	32	38	180	288	321	76	95	169	22	108	102	85	123	157
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.26	0.33	0.33	0.11	0.11	0.17	0.03	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.14	0.16
Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center	2	5	5	172	143	109	19	9	2	27	24	26	21	58	17
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.003	0.01	0.01	0.25	0.16	0.11	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.07	0.02
Waxter Children's Center*	2	N/A	N/A	14	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.003	N/A	N/A	0.02	N/A	N/A	0.00	N/A	N/A	0.003	N/A	N/A	0.004	N/A	N/A
Western Maryland Children's Center	36	38	57	151	141	256	26	19	40	18	34	33	24	23	46
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.22	0.16	0.26	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.05
Total Detention Incident Count	163	133	157	946	997	1232	253	198	278	131	269	221	436	593	678
Detention Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.23	0.15	0.16	1.35	1.14	1.28	0.36	0.23	0.29	0.19	0.31	0.23	0.62	0.68	0.70
Committed Programs															
Backbone Mountain Youth Center	19	23	41	63	156	223	0	0	0	8	30	35	12	15	27
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.13	0.29	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.05
Green Ridge Youth Center	15	50	56	133	348	414	0	0	0	16	36	41	21	35	66
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.03	0.09	0.12	0.28	0.65	0.73	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.07	0.12
Victor Cullen Center	10	27	31	39	89	89	1	11	8	14	26	13	14	21	32
Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.17	0.16	0.002	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.06
Total Committed Incident Count	44	100	138	235	593	726	1	11	8	38	92	89	47	71	125
Committed Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.09	0.19	0.24	0.49	1.11	1.29	0.002	0.02	0.01	0.08	0.17	0.16	0.10	0.13	0.22
Total State-Operated (Detention & Committed)															
Total State-Operated Incident Count	207	233	295	1181	1590	1958	254	209	286	169	361	310	483	664	803
State-Operated Rate Per 100 Youth Days	0.18	0.16	0.19	1.00	1.12	1.28	0.22	0.15	0.19	0.14	0.26	0.20	0.41	0.47	0.52

*N/A indicates that the facility was not housing youth for the calendar year.

The Department will further review JJMU's 2024 4th Quarter report to integrate into DJS' work plans.

Please accept this as the Department's response to your Fourth Quarter monitoring report and do not hesitate to contact Marc Schindler, Assistant Secretary & Chief of Staff, if you have any questions.

JUVENILE SERVICES EDUCATION PROGRAM (JSEP) – RESPONSE

JSEP Response to the JJMU 2024 4th Quarter and Annual Report

Educational Services

Elective Courses

The JSEP educational program includes all courses and requirements necessary for graduation. In addition to the core courses referenced in the JJMU report, JSEP offers CRD I and II as part of the completer pathway for high school graduation. Through the CTE program, students can also take Foundations of Computer Science and Foundations of Engineering and Technology, both of which fulfill Maryland's high school technology credit requirement.

As noted in past JJMU reports, many students enter JSEP schools under-credited. Falling behind in credits and not being on track to graduate with their peers is a significant factor in school dropout rates. To address this, JSEP provides an accelerated program that allows students to earn credits twice as quickly as they would in their home schools. This opportunity helps students return to their schools on track for a timely graduation, motivating them to stay in school upon release.

To support this accelerated learning, JSEP employs longer class periods, resulting in fewer classes per day. School counselors focus on individual student needs, creating schedules and long-term plans that prioritize graduation requirements. Elective credits are offered during the summer, with additional enrichment opportunities available through clubs and activities in partnership with CHAMPS.

JSEP teachers work longer days and a longer school year than their counterparts across the state. In addition to their instructional responsibilities, they often lead afterschool clubs, making it unrealistic to extend their schedules further to offer additional electives—especially given existing teacher vacancy and retention challenges. Given these factors, JSEP prioritizes accelerated credit accumulation as the most beneficial option for students.

In addition to core classes and CTE courses, JSEP students can fulfill all graduation requirements through various platforms that JSEP has purchased. Health and PE are offered in person during the summer and online through our Edmentum platform during the school year. For example, last summer, 38 students enrolled in their PE requirement, with 75 enrolled in Health.

Students can also meet their fine arts requirements by taking art or music appreciation—eight students have done so since the beginning of FY25. Additionally, 25 students have enrolled in world language courses as part of their high school completer pathway. JSEP also provides opportunities to meet LEA-specific requirements in various content areas. For instance, four students are currently taking Probability and Statistics, and another four are enrolled in Physics.

The impact of these opportunities is evident in the 144% increase in LEA graduations at JSEP schools, from FY23 (JSEP's initial year) to FY24.

Vacancies

After reaching a low of 11% in October 2024, the vacancy rate has steadily risen to 19%. Schools in JSEP's most remote counties—Allegany, Garrett, and Wicomico—have minimal vacancies, with either one or none. In contrast, schools serving the majority of JSEP students, located in more central counties, bear the brunt of higher vacancies.

JSEP anticipates this trend will persist until summer, as most of its teacher candidates come from LEAs where contracts extend through the end of the school year. Breaking an LEA contract in Maryland can result in the loss of teaching credentials. Several candidates have expressed interest in joining JSEP in July, and contracts have been signed. However, these agreements are only binding for JSEP, leaving candidates free to accept other offers. Historically, JSEP experiences a drop in vacancy rates during the summer when teachers can transition between jobs more freely.

Current vacancies per school are as follows:

- **BCJJC** – Math, Science, CTE, Social Studies, Librarian, PE (25%)
- **CHHS** – Math, English, Social Studies, MLL, School Counselor (20%)
- **CYDC** – MLL, Librarian, 2 Special Education, Social Studies, Resource, CTE (30%)
- **GRYC** – Resource (8%)
- **VCC** – Math, Social Worker, Special Education, Science, CTE (38%)
- **WMCC** – Resource (11%)

JSEP is actively collaborating with DJS HR staff to explore innovative recruitment strategies, attending career fairs, and engage with teacher education programs to attract more candidates.

Remaining Challenges

Attracting and Retaining Teachers

The JSEP Board Legislative Subcommittee has done extensive research and engaged in extensive discussion on topics like the 20-year retirement system, a ten or twelve month school year option for teachers. However, after months of discussion and research, none of these proposals proved to be viable options.

JSEP continues to offer competitive hiring bonuses to attract qualified teaching candidates and added additional funds for hard to fill locations and hard to fill content areas like math, MLL and science teachers. Retention bonuses have once again been approved by the Department of Budget and Management in hopes of creating stability among our instructional staff that will lead to better student outcomes and stronger schools.

Teaching by “Grade Level”

JSEP is in support of teaching students by high school course or cohort rather than by unit and would agree that if the safety and security of students and staff can be maintained and

the facility can move students in a way that would not take away educational time, this would be the better educational practice. Backbone Youth Center and Green Ridge Youth Center's students have been scheduling students by course since May 1, 2023. Additionally, JSEP is working with Victor Cullen to transition students to a schedule that allows students to move by course instead of by housing unit. Both youth centers have, at times, had to abandon subject-specific instruction altogether due to student conflicts. JSEP supports the goal of teaching by course or cohort but emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique limitations of this setting.

The term frequently used, as it is in the JJMU report, is going to school by grade level. This significantly underplays the complexity of having homogeneous courses as is the goal in this proposal. The term grade level is more appropriately applied to the education of elementary school students. Successfully completing high school is contingent on the passing of predetermined courses, not grade levels. In the best circumstances not all 9th graders are enrolled in the same courses. In the JSEP setting these disparities are magnified. Students come in with missing pieces to their educational path; so while it is commonly thought a 10th grader would be in geometry, English 10, and the same social studies and science course as all other 10th graders, this is rarely the case. And these differences become more exaggerated the older the students get.

In order to ensure that this model is successful JSEP and DJS Residential staff will have to work to ensure we are implementing strong safety protocols, comprehensive mental health supports, and structured academic planning, in order to create a safe and supportive learning environment. A collaborative approach involving residential staff, educators, mental health professionals, and administrators is essential to ensuring student success and well-being.

Building upon Current Progress

Seat Time

JSEP does not determine the completion of high school courses based on *seat time* but rather on mastery of the standards, as permitted by COMAR. This decision was intentionally made when JSEP became a school system and was approved by the JSEP Board. That said, and as JJMU has reported, many JSEP students enter with significant educational deficits. Addressing these deficits while ensuring students are on track to successfully reintegrate into their high school classes requires direct instruction from teachers. Small class sizes and longer class periods not only provide students with the time needed to master the concepts in yearlong high school courses in a semester, but also allows teachers to deliver targeted instruction. Additionally, JSEP students very rarely require elective courses. However, if needed, electives are available in the summer or through JSEP's education partners.

Project-Based Learning

The JSEP curricula has been written or adopted based on best practices according to current research. Project-Based Learning (PBL), which gained popularity in the 1980s and 90s, encountered several problems in its implementation with a corresponding drop in the achievement of US students as compared to students in other countries. PBL was criticized for not adequately

emphasizing critical thinking skills and deeper knowledge acquisition. These factors led to a shift towards a curricula focused on developing those abilities through active learning strategies, including analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving, which are core components of critical thinking based education. This shift equips students with the ability to not just complete projects but also understand the reasoning behind their actions and apply their knowledge in different contexts.

JSEP's curricula align with the cognitive complexity and rigor outlined by the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP). JSEP students are required to take and meet proficiency or participation requirements for specific MCAP assessments to graduate. Maryland's Senate Bill 497 requires JSEP must provide academic instruction that meets Maryland's education standards and earn credits that allow them to transition smoothly back to their community schools

JSEP's curricula are gaining statewide attention for their quality and effectiveness.

- The Coordinator of Mathematics presented the JSEP math curriculum at the 2024 Maryland Council of Teachers of Mathematics (MCTM) Annual Conference and was asked to write an article in the *MCTM Newsletter* on curriculum development.
- The Coordinator of English and Social Studies is scheduled for an interview with *Maryland Humanities* for a blog article highlighting the successful integration of the National History Day curriculum within JSEP.
- Both the Coordinator of English and the Coordinator of Mathematics have been selected to serve on the Launch Years Committee and the Standards Committee under Maryland's *Blueprint* initiatives. Their expertise in curriculum development, standards alignment, and pedagogy has earned them this recognition.

Practices and implementations surrounding the CTE curricula will be addressed later in the response.

Health, PE, Art and Music

Physical Education (PE) and Health are high school graduation requirements offered by JSEP. The PE class is conducted in collaboration with DJS. During the summer session, JSEP content teachers who are also certified in PE and Health provide instruction. During the school year, JSEP delivers these courses through its online platform. To fulfill the physical activity requirement of the PE class, students log their hours of participation in large muscle activities after school with DJS. JSEP has been unable to fill PE teaching positions they have had posted for their larger school for over a year.

All students must also complete a fine arts course to graduate. They can fulfill this requirement by taking Art or Music Appreciation which is available to them. While this does not align precisely with the creative outlet referenced in the JJMU report, it supports students' progress toward graduation.

GED

All JSEP students complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) when they enter or transfer to a JSEP school. The ILP focuses on the student's interests, talents, and goals, as well as areas where they feel challenged. This allows school counselors to ensure that each student is on an educational path aligned with their aspirations.

During the process of completing the ILP, secondary students are asked about their graduation pathway, including the possibility of taking the GED. Any student who chooses this path receives the full support of the JSEP staff. Recognizing that many JSEP students pursue this route, GED-aligned goals are embedded in every curriculum unit. Success on the GED requires two types of knowledge: content knowledge (including reading comprehension) and test-taking skills. The JSEP core curriculum is designed to deliver content knowledge, with teachers who specialize in different content areas helping students access and understand the content material.

Additionally, most campuses now have designated class periods and teachers specifically for GED test preparation. These sessions are designed to focus on developing test-taking skills and addressing specific areas as identified through students' official practice tests. However, due to ongoing staff shortages within DJS, these pullout sessions often cannot occur as planned.

Real Life Training and Experience

The assumption from the last bullet in this section is that JJMU is referring to the opportunities for JSEP's post-secondary students. JSEP has transformed the opportunities available to these students in the last two years. The challenges faced by detained students is not indicative of JSEPs inability to meet students' unique educational needs. Safety and security restricts some opportunities for students, particularly in the hardware secure detention and treatment centers. Examples being, institutional restrictions on student internet access (needed to fully participate in course work) or with insufficient DJS or JSEP staffing available to facilitate innovative educational programs. The length of stay in a JSEP school is another significant limiting factor, and will continue to be so under any innovative school model.

JSEP currently offers comprehensive career and technical education (CTE) courses via the Career Research and Development state-approved CTE program. JSEP is currently offering the first 2 courses (CRD I & II) of the 3-course sequence. The 3rd course, work-based learning (WBL), will require a greater level of communication, coordinator, and collaboration between the JSEP and DJS to implement. JSEP has proposed and advocates for on-campus YOLO opportunities to be expanded so that students can earn work-based learning (WBL) credit towards graduation, much the way that they are paid a minimum wage now. The JSEP CTE coordinator can be contacted to facilitate any conversation with DJS residential and workforce development to figure out how this can be implemented as soon as the fall of 2025.

JSEP has addressed the needs of hands-on and interactive learning via VR headsets. VR is more than interactive, it's immersive. The VR system offers a wide range of career exploration and training simulations, particularly focused on workforce development in industries like manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and public safety. These simulations range from 5

minutes to 20 minutes. VR allows students to self-select from dozens of careers, providing learners with autonomy and choice. When students find a career industry of interest to them, they can choose longer training simulations that allow them to take a deeper look at specific industries. The JSEP CTE program coordinator firmly believes that career exposure and soft-skill development is the best use of instructional time for students while detained or committed to DJS. This learning tool is used with both secondary and graduate students. In the average 40-day stay of a typical JSEP student, this is an excellent resource for providing student's exposure to various careers in meaningfully, interactive ways, while maintaining the institutional safety and security protocols. Network challenges have prohibited the full implementation of VR headsets. However, much progress has been made in recent weeks. As of today, over 70% of the VR headsets are fully operable and able to connect to the DJS networks. When fully implemented, the VR head set program will provide highly "targeted and relevant educational programming".

JSEP has also purchased, through grant funding, Skillcat, a training program which allows students across the state to complete skill trade training through interactive content. Students also have available to them 40 Conover kits across all the JSEP schools which are hands-on learning modules. For example, the kit for small engine repair contains a Briggs and Stratton engine that fully disassembles. Students can build and rebuild the engine, they can change spark plugs or oil, and learn to do any number of engine repairs. The cosmetology kit has hair and all the tools necessary for learning the basics of cosmetology. BMYC offers cabling and JSEP is considering expanding the program to other campuses in the near future. Graduates at VCC now have a Forklift Simulator. This multi-hour training resource provides training on multiple lift types. All of these allow for career exploration, the first step in working toward a career that the students will enjoy and that will pay them a living wage.

Additionally, there are several options with JSEP's nine community college partners who offer an array of vocational classes and certification opportunities. JSEP has made efforts to ensure smooth transitions for JSEP college students returning back to the community by partnering with schools across the state so students can transition to the community college near their home. JSEP has a program to lend students Chromebooks to use when they leave to enable them to finish their college classes.

"Courses that lead to certification in high-demand fields coupled with work experiences and job placement" such as barbering, cosmetology, nursing, HVAC, auto mechanics, information technology, carpentry, business (entrepreneurship), culinary arts, construction, and the trucking industry (CDL) are best suited for our high school graduates. MSDE defines these types of certifications as Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs). However, stakeholders should know that meaningful certifications take meaningful time. The average length of stay is 40 days. For the vast majority of the students, some of that time is spent either taking the courses to complete their LEA high school requirements or studying for and completing the GED. Again, the length of stay in a JSEP school is, and will likely continue to be, an issue for JSEP students wishing to obtain an IRC.

Individualized Learning Based on the Student

Within five days of a student entering any JSEP school an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) is developed or revised. The idea of individualizing student plans around their strengths,

goals, and interests was so important to JSEP that it was the first policy written and approved in May of 2022, before there was a single student enrolled in a JSEP school.

The JSEP ILP is a dynamic document initiated when a youth enters a JSEP school which documents student needs, goals, and challenges to be met in order for a student to reach their educational and career goals. The ILP specifically details courses, preparations, and activities needed for high school graduation, vocational training, or college course work. It is updated every 30 calendar days to reflect the ongoing needs and progress of each student. This plan also forms the basis for the student's transition plan. JSEP would be happy to provide a copy of their ILP plan to any member of the JJMU team who is interested in seeing it.

Thank you for allowing us to take this opportunity to respond to the JJMU 2024 4th Quarter and annual report.