

The Problem

The Department of Youth Services (DYS) has not been receiving sufficient funds to support effective programs to rehabilitate youth and successfully transition them back to our communities.

Further shortfalls in FY2010 will cause a crisis at DHS, compromising the care of the children and youth served and the safety of the public.

FY2009 and proposed FY2010 funding for DHS has dropped below what is needed just to maintain current programs:

- The original budget for the current fiscal year (FY2009) allocated only \$163 million to DHS – \$4 million *less* than what it needed to simply maintain rehabilitative services and programs.
- The bare-bones budget has been pared even further during the year by \$4.4 million of 9C and other cuts, so that DHS projects being able to spend only \$158.6 million during FY2009.
- The Governor's FY2010 budget (House 1) provides only \$153 million.

Beyond its current programs, DHS needs new funding to oversee secure Alternative Lock-up Programs (ALPs) for youth arrested in our state's 351 cities and towns when courts are closed.

- Unlike the non-secure ALPs, which have been funded and overseen by the Department of Children and Families, secure ALPs, which are required in order to meet a federal mandate, have been federally funded through the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS). This federal funding has been cut, so the Commonwealth must now pay for secure ALPs.
- In order to protect the public, safeguard the rights of youth, and comply with the federal mandate, DHS must be allocated \$2.9 million to oversee 5 regional secure ALPs.

The Impact

This funding gap will force DHS to continue to cut essential programs and services, with dire consequences for the safety of youth and the public:

- *The safety of the public will be at risk:*
 - DHS has had to close more than 50 residential beds this fiscal year, in addition to the 191 residential beds that were closed last year in such communities as Brockton, Springfield, Worcester, Westborough, Barnstable and Grafton. This large reduction in beds has made it difficult to separate older youth from younger children or members of rival groups, and forced DHS to return youth to the community sooner than is prudent.

- The plan to open the only transitional living program in Boston, an essential step for successful re-entry to the community, has been cancelled.
- DYS will be forced to reduce and/or eliminate such essential services as GED classes and vocational training, both key components to reducing recidivism rates.
- *The safety of the children and youth in DYS custody will be at risk:*
 - DYS will be unable to maintain the full range of programs needed to serve the wide range of ages in its caseload (from those under 12 all the way up to 21).
 - Continuing detention programs will be overcrowded, requiring youth to be double bunked and sleep on gym floors.
 - Mental health services will be cut back. These services were only recently upgraded in response to a rash of suicides and suicide attempts. Reducing those services now will jeopardize the ability of DYS to meet the mental health needs of youth in its custody and keep them safe.
 - DYS is the placement of last resort for many of the highest need youth. As the economy declines, the stress on children and families will increase while funding for prevention and intervention services (in schools, local government agencies, and non-profit organizations) will decrease. DYS must be prepared for an increase in its caseload especially among the highest need youth.
- *The proposed budget is penny-wise and pound-foolish: the ultimate cost to the taxpayers will greatly exceed any short-term savings provided through program cuts:*
 - The failure to rehabilitate these youth not only causes personal harm to the future victims, but also imposes a hefty cost to the taxpayers. It is estimated that each youth who grow up to be a career criminal will cost the taxpayer well over a million dollars (through the cost of time in adult prison, lost taxes and lost wages, healthcare for uninsured, etc.).
 - Beginning in 2003, the legislature provided DYS with specific funding: to hire licensed mental health clinicians, to hire certified teachers to improve the quality of educational services, and implement gender-specific services. These targeted investments helped achieve a dramatic reduction in recidivism rates (for males 26% and females 5%, which are 11 year lows!). Budget cuts will end these targeted investments and will drive up the recidivism rates.
 - The projected financial shortfall will force DYS to cut such essential services as preventative medical care and rely instead on much more costly emergency room visits. Taxpayers will ultimately pay a lot more for this shift.

The Solution

At a minimum, the DYS budget must be \$166 million.