



State of Oklahoma

## OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

---

To: The Board of Juvenile Affairs and the Oklahoma Youth Academy Charter School Board  
From: Rachel C. Holt, interim Executive Director  
Date: April 14, 2020  
Re: COVID-19 Response

---

In lieu of our scheduled OJA board meeting, I have prepared this report as a public summary of OJA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am honored to serve in this role and I am proud of the work being done by OJA staff and community partners in the common goal of keeping our youth and staff healthy and safe. I have been involved in multiple national webinars regarding other states' responses to the pandemic. I am pleased to report that OJA's response is in line with and, in many ways, ahead of the response across the nation. I believe our efforts in educating and supporting our youth and staff are the reason why there have been zero confirmed cases of COVID-19 in any levels of our juvenile justice system. We have accomplished this through collaboration and smart, proactive actions.

Here is a summary of the OJA's response to COVID-19:

### **Health and Safety Precautions**

OJA is committed to the continued health and safety of youth and staff. On April 9, OJA received health and safety supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) from the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH). On April 10, the supplies were distributed to the Central Oklahoma Juvenile Center (COJC), Southwest Oklahoma Juvenile Center (SWOJC), and group homes and detention centers across the state.

At COJC and SWOJC, efforts began at the onset of the emergency to ensure a sufficient stock of PPE, hygiene, cleaning, food and medical supplies. Cleaning and disinfecting practices were intensified at both facilities. COVID-19 protocols for hand washing and social distancing strategies on individual, group and operational levels were developed and executed. Immediate practices were put in place for verbal screening for staff entering the facility including temperature checks. Our nursing staff continues to monitor the health and temperatures of all residents. There is frequent communication to staff and residents regarding our efforts to keep them safe. Staff is advised to wear masks while on duty.

All OJA-contracted detention centers, group homes and shelters have instituted new procedures in accordance with Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for the prevention of COVID-19. At this time, there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in OJA's system. OJA



State of Oklahoma

## OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

---

has worked with our partners on any concerns they have expressed. OJA has provided PPE and supplies based on availability for our partners.

OJA continues to order and apply for resources to assist in the continued health and safety of youth and staff. The Oklahoma District Attorneys Council allowed OJA to request PPE and supplies through a federal grant. We appreciate the partnerships among state agencies during this pandemic.

### **Court Reviews**

On March 18, OJA requested through the Oklahoma Administrator of the Courts that all court reviews for OJA custody youth in placement be conducted via telephone and/or videoconference.

Oklahoma's Chief Justice has issued two orders that have closed courthouses, except for essential functions, and delayed court reviews and hearings until May 15, 2020. Our juvenile services unit (JSU) staff is working to obtain any orders necessary to extend or end jurisdiction for any youth that will turn 18 or 19 years old during this time period.

I am working with district attorneys to request that they move forward, using video or telephone conferencing, on court hearings to adjudicate any pending juvenile or youthful offender cases if there is no question of guilt or certification. Our JSU staff is ready and able to perform intakes, referrals and placements through remote technology. It is important that these adjudications and placements are not delayed to the detriment of the youth, many of whom are close to jurisdictional age limits.

### **Placements**

OJA is continuing placements of OJA custody youth into their identified placements. Our placement unit issued a 1-week hold on placements to our contracted group homes to provide a reset period. OJA has resumed placements to group homes. Our group home partners have been excellent in accepting new intakes and providing treatment and rehabilitation services for OJA youth.

Due to COVID-19 concerns and our inability to determine exposure that youth may have had waiting for a placement while in the community, OJA is not sending any youth from the community into placement at this time.



State of Oklahoma

## **OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS**

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

---

Juveniles being referred to all placements have all been in a secure detention setting for a minimum of 14 days, and at this point the majority are in excess of 30 days, in a contained environment where their health has been monitored.

Any new juvenile coming to either COJC or SWOJC is quarantined for 14 days.

Any time a youth is transported or admitted to a facility, their temperature is taken and recorded by assigned staff. A medical screening shall be conducted by facility staff to ensure there has been no exposure to a contagious virus or communicable disease.

### **Paroles and Releases**

JSU is working to lower our population for OJA custody youth in all levels of out-of-home placement to help ease the burden on youth and staff in congregate care and stay ahead of anticipated staffing shortages across the juvenile justice system. OJA is consulting with the assigned judges and attorneys regarding these decisions.

COJC and SWOJC staff are working with our JSU staff to identify youth who may be appropriate for release to the community. This is also in cooperation with judges and in collaboration with our youth service agencies who will assist in providing services for these youth when they are returned to their community.

All OJA custody youth who are eligible and appropriate for community passes are being granted those passes. If the youth are successful on their community pass, they remain in the community.

COJC and SWOJC have changed their pass protocol. Typically, a Community Phase resident would petition for a pass after several weeks in that level. The resident would be granted a 5-day pass and then return to the facility for approximately 10 days and then if successful would have a second 5-day pass back to the community. After the second pass, the resident would return to the facility for parole consideration. During this pandemic, we are allowing residents to petition for passes sooner. Once a resident is approved for a pass, and in consultation with the judge and attorneys in the case, the resident is released on a 10-day pass to the community. If the resident is successful on their community pass, they are granted parole and remain in the community.



State of Oklahoma

# OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

## COVID-19 secure care population reduction efforts since 3/12/2020

4/14/20 SWOJC 41 on roll 40 on facility	4/14/20 COJC 37 on roll
<u>Parole:</u> D.C. 3/19 M.T. 3/19 J.H. 3/26 T.M. 3/31 J.A. (medical) 3/31 E.I. 4/7 R.J. 4/13 C.G. 4/13 <u>Court ordered Discharge:</u> C.A. 04/06	<u>Parole:</u> N.J. 4/6 R.B. 4/14 <u>Court ordered Discharge:</u> J.L. 3/12 DOC K.S. 3/23 C.S. 4/3 M.F. 4/10
<u>Intakes:</u> 4	<u>Intakes:</u> 3
Reduction percentage (does not include intakes): 20%	Reduction percentage (does not include intakes): 15%
Total combined reduction percentage (does not include intakes): 18%	

## Detention

JSU continues to work with judges and attorneys in identifying youth who can safely be released from secure detention back to their home community.

OJA is also asking judges to only use secure juvenile detention center beds for those youth that truly pose a serious risk to themselves or the community and are alleged to have committed a serious or violent felony.

On March 30, OJA received notice from the Beckham County Commissioners wanting to terminate their contract with OJA for secure detention services. The Beckham County Detention Center is located in Elk City and is a 6-bed facility. At the time of notice, there were 5 juveniles at the detention center. OJA staff worked to relocate the 5 residents to other detention centers in the state. OJA moved the last resident from the Beckham County Detention Center on April 3, and ceased payment that day.

On March 31, OJA received notice that the Texas County Detention Center, a 6-bed facility located in Hooker was experiencing staffing issues due to a COVID-19 confirmation in the town



State of Oklahoma

## **OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS**

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

---

(not a staff member). Texas County Detention Center has suspended its admissions (and payment) and will re-evaluate on April 30 if they are able to reopen on May 1.

Through the efforts of our JSU staff, in collaboration with judges and attorneys across the state, Oklahoma has significantly reduced its detention population. The detention population on March 18 was 205 residents. The detention population for today, April 14, is 111 residents. We have a total bed count in the system of 267 beds. Today we are at 41% capacity in the system, down from 77% on March 18.

### **Employees**

Almost all of OJA's administrative staff is teleworking, in compliance with the governor's executive order. This includes our state office staff, JSU staff across the state and our OYACS teachers. All those employees that are able to telework are on temporary telework agreements per OJA policy.

I have deemed all staff at COJC and SWOJC as essential to critical infrastructure. Our staff has been showing up healthy and ready to continue work with our youth. OJA is navigating through the administrative process of implementing a pay differential to recognize the commitment and sacrifice of our secure care staff.

### **Oklahoma Youth Academy Charter School (OYACS)**

The teachers and staff of OJA's charter school, Oklahoma Youth Academy Charter School (OYACS) operated at COJC and SWOJC were on spring break March 16-20. During that week, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE) made the decision to suspend school through April 6 and has now decided to suspend school through this school year. At that time, I decided to allow OYACS teachers and staff to telework from home. They worked on lesson plans, remote learning activities, and developing resources for distance learning. On April 6, OYACS teachers began teaching their students remotely. There were a few technical adjustments, but our teachers and students are now acclimated to the new system and continuing robust educational engagement.

OJA appreciates and acknowledges the extra work this has placed on the direct care staff at COJC and SWOJC, who are assisting our residents in connecting and cooperating with their remote teachers. As a part of the temporary telework agreement with OYACS teachers and staff, they can be asked to report to the facility at any time. All secure-care staff is fully trained and certified to work as direct care staff and may be called to do so in the event of a staffing shortage or emergency.



State of Oklahoma

## **OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS**

Rachel Canuso Holt, interim Executive Director

---

Director of Education Melissa White is working with our contracted detention centers and group homes to create distance learning opportunities and engagement during this statewide education shut down.

### **Visitation**

On March 18, visitation at both COJC and SWOJC was canceled, and residents at both facilities have remained on site for their safety. Phone and video visits with family, mentors, and JSU staff have been increased.

OJA's partners at OJA-contracted group homes, detention centers and shelters have also limited visitation in their facilities. They have also increased the opportunity for family and JSU visitation via telephone and videoconference.

Face-to-face visits by JSU workers with youth, families, providers, etc., are suspended. Staff is using email, video or phone calls to meet supervision requirements as outlined in OJA policy.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your continued support during this pandemic. We are confident in the strength of our plan and our continued mission. Our dedication to positive, healthy outcomes for the youth and families we serve has never been stronger.