

WAMC

New York News

Youth Advocates Call on NY to Close Empty Juvenile Jails

ALBANY, NY (2008-03-26) Community Organizations, advocates and lawmakers gathered in Albany for an event focusing on the juvenile detention facilities that the Office of Children and Family Services is trying to close. Capital District Bureau Chief Dave Lucas was there and filed this report.

Back in January the OCFS announced plans to close six underutilized facilities in the juvenile justice system. The annual cost to taxpayers to keep such facilities open is around 200-thousand dollars a year PER CHILD. The advocates say those facilities are failing to rehabilitate young offenders. They're calling for the development of preventative programs as alternatives to incarceration and urging that existing programs be utilized... most of these programs cost, at the highest level, 15 thousand dollars a year per child. The coalition is urging the state to use the cost savings from facility closures to boost these alternative programs. They've got a fight on their hands: On March 12th, the New York State Senate introduced a budget resolution to keep three facilities open, even though the facilities are either mostly or completely empty. It would also prohibit the transfer of any staff members or residents to alternate facilities. Take [Brace Residential Center](#) in Masonville, Delaware County, for example: it is a juvenile detention facility for boys aged 13 to 17 year-old. It can serve 25 boys, but only 2 live there now. That translates into an annual cost to taxpayers of 5 Million Dollars, just to house the two boys. Assemblyman William Scarborough has championed youth initiatives and believes it's time to switch from shipping juveniles to upstate jails to placing them in programs in their own communities The Juvenile Justice Coalition is urging the state to use the cost savings from the facility closures to fund a network of community-based programs to be set up as alternatives to incarceration. Ruben Austria is the founder of "Bronx Connect," an alternative to incarceration program. He says the routine jailing of young offenders is rooted in overblown, exaggerated media crime reporting Advocates point to several studies which have demonstrated that the most successful juvenile programs are those that work with an entire family rather than only with an adjudicated youth, addressing the reasons why the children committed crimes in the first place. Extensive research has shown that these programs can lower the rearrest rates by 25 percent to 70 percent. The advocates met with 35 legislators today. Mishi Faruqee is hopeful that the Assembly will stand firm and reject the Senate budget resolution to keep the three underutilized facilities open. © Copyright 2008, WAMC