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DATE: March 5, 2020
Bill Number: HB 1136 - Department of Juvenile Services - Juvenile Strategic Reentry Program
DJS Position: Letter of Information

The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS or department) is providing information for SB 769.

HB 1136 codifies current DJS policy and processes regarding juvenile re-entry strategic planning. DJS has already implemented focused efforts to assist with this transition by executing five key goals:

1. Reduce recidivism by providing supervision to all youth returning home from committed care.
2. Families of committed youth are engaged at all key case planning decision points.
3. All committed youth needing educational services are connected to local education resources.
4. All committed youth are introduced to career development resources.
5. All youth in need of behavioral or somatic health services are connected to local resources to provide continuity of care.

The current DJS re-entry process is managed by a team of regional re-entry specialists. Their primary function is to increase communication among those stakeholders who are essential to the youths' success from initial placement to their return home. These stakeholders include schools, community partners, law enforcement, and other public agencies to coordinate services and resources. The re-entry teams meet with the youth and their family 45 days prior to release. During this time, the youth's housing plan, educational/ occupational needs, ongoing behavioral/somatic health service requirements, and family relationships are reviewed to ensure that treatment and services are not interrupted. Families of committed youth are invited to and encouraged to participate in the re-entry planning process, which is a key area for family engagement.

After the youth has been in the community for 30 days, a DJS re-entry specialist follows up to assure that the youth has accessed all needed services, has successfully re-enrolled in their local public school if needed, and has remained in stable housing. Unlike the language in the bill, the DJS strategic re-entry plan allows caseworkers to slowly decrease the time between meetings to gradually reduce DJS involvement when appropriate.

The Department utilizes the re-entry coordinators in each of the six DJS regions who serve as liaisons between case managers, local schools and community resources to fully implement the five re-entry goals. These goals emphasize DJS, family, and community service provider engagement and interaction to increase communication among those most essential to our youths' success during the placement and community re-entry process.

Re-Entry and Aftercare

While approximately 35,000 youth are processed every year at the DJS's intake centers throughout Maryland, only about 2,000 of those youth will eventually be ordered by a court to receive treatment in a facility either in Maryland or in another state. At some point, those 2,000 youths will complete their respective treatment programs and return to their communities.

What Is Re-Entry and Aftercare?

Re-entry and Aftercare are a collection of programs and policies designed to assist youth in their transition to life back in their community after they have completed court-ordered treatment.

Why Is Re-Entry and Aftercare Important?

Recent research has shown that effective and timely re-entry and aftercare programs increase the success rate for youth when they return to the community by providing continued counseling, services and employment training and assistance. These efforts help the youth continue his or her progress and avoid getting in more trouble.