



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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August 6, 2026

Eric Thomas, Legislative Auditor
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
106 11th Ave SW
PO Box 40910
Olympia, WA 98504-0910

Dear Mr. Thomas,

The Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) is in receipt of the July 2026 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee's (JLARC) DCYF Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) Programs report and respectfully submits this formal response.

We believe the report reinforces the agency's position that operating above capacity is unsafe for both young people and staff. The rapid growth in the JR population – following the passage of JR to 25 – without adequate capacity and staffing has directly attributed to the concerns outlined and confirmed in the report. We concur with JLARC's eight recommendations that require action from both the legislature and DCYF.

Furthermore, we agree with the acknowledgment by JLARC that all of the recommendations are interconnected and must be addressed together to improve safety, programming, and outcomes for young people. For instance, the recommendation for the legislature to address capacity will require additional funding or policy change. DCYF cannot address overcapacity without their help.

Addressing these recommendations is a top priority for us. We did not wait until the report was finalized to begin work on our part. Many of the recommendations reflect work that began prior to the conclusion of the JLARC review. In fact, over the past 12 months, DCYF has:

- Deployed various strategies to address overcrowding, such as opening Harbor Heights, expanding Community Transition Services, and enhancing security measures.
- Implemented a new process for handling rule violations in a way that is fair, clear, and consistent for both staff and young people.
- Focused on our workforce experience by expanding the new employee academy training, providing policy and procedure clarity, and removing counselors from the security duties. As a result, we have increased staff retention. JR is already seeing improvements, with turnover now down to 22.8% between January 2025-June 2026.

- Begun working with external consultants to identify options to expand capacity as directed by the legislature.
- Increased recreation, educational, and vocation programming for all young people. This includes providing a college option for young women at Echo Glen.
- Implemented a comprehensive assessment improvement strategy that builds on our existing assessment processes. This will continue to ensure JR matches the needs of young people and to strengthen assessment governance, validation, reliability, and quality assurance.

Please see the enclosed recommendation response matrix for further information.

We want to thank the JLARC staff for their comprehensive and collaborative review of the JR programs. We also want to thank the numerous staff and young people across DCYF and JR who participated in data collection, observations, tours, and focus groups over the past two years.

Thank you again for your analysis, partnership, and commitment to ensuring the success of DCYF's mission that all Washington's children and youth grow up safe and healthy, thriving physically, emotionally, and educationally, nurtured by family and community.

Sincerely,



Tana Senn
DCYF Secretary

Enclosures:

JLARC Recommendation Response Matrix

cc: Jenny Heddin, Chief Programming Officer, DCYF
Jennifer Redman, Assistant Secretary of Juvenile Rehabilitation, DCYF
Rebecca Kelly, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Juvenile Rehabilitation, DCYF

JLARC Recommendation Response Matrix

Recommendation	Agency Position	Comments
The Legislature should consider addressing crowding issues at DCYF secure facilities to improve safety.	☒ Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF agrees that the legislature must address the need for current and future secure capacity or change policy to reduce capacity needs.
DCYF should take steps to increase staff retention, especially for front-line staff.	☒ Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF agrees that staff is our most important resource and low retention creates an unsafe environment for staff and young people. Utilizing our nationwide justice partners, we continue to identify strategies that have been effective in recruitment and retention. JR is already seeing improvements, with turnover now at 22.8% between January 2025-June 2026. JR direct care staff compensation continues to be lower than similar positions in other juvenile and adult counties and state justice organizations. We are developing a plan that will focus on hiring quality staff, training them before they start, and supporting them throughout their career.
DCYF should improve staff training to ensure staff are safe, supported, and prepared for their jobs.	☒ Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF continues to enhance its training program to ensure alignment with juvenile justice standards, while recognizing our unique population mix of youth and young adults up to age 25. We have expanded our new employee academy training, providing policy and procedure clarity, and removing counselors from security duties. We need legislative funding for adequate backfill to relieve direct care staff so they can attend in-service trainings, without creating staffing shortages that would impact safety and create programmatic disruptions.
DCYF should develop clear incident response procedures for assaults, riots, and other incidents and ensure the procedures are followed.	☒ Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF has already begun this important work and continues to refine policy and procedural work to support direct care staff. However, DCYF continues to face challenges due to an antiquated case management system that makes it difficult to update and pull data.

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DCYF should use validated assessments that accurately predict risks and identify needs of its population.	X Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF agrees that validated and reliable assessment tools and processes are essential to making informed decisions about young people’s placement, programming, and rehabilitation needs. DCYF has an assessment process in place and is committed to ensuring that the tools we use are validated and applied consistently, fairly, and in alignment with evidence-based practices. However, this takes time and tools cannot be used ‘off the shelf’ and applied universally to our current and very unique population that varies in age and gender. DCYF is in the process of implementing a comprehensive assessment improvement strategy. To this end, JR has established a workgroup dedicated to this effort, as well as processes to inventory, evaluate, and recommend changes to assessment tools, as needs are identified. We have also begun actively reviewing and improving our assessment practices, including strengthening staff training, quality assurance processes, data collection, and assessment governance.
DCYF should evaluate the mix of rehabilitative programs offered to ensure they align with the needs of its current population.	X Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	DCYF will continue efforts to evaluate the mix of rehabilitative programs offered to best meet the needs of the population. DCYF programs have historically been offered to address the changing needs of the population, as measured by the Integrated Developmental Evaluation and Assessment (IDEA) tool, which is designed to identify needs across a range of domains, including: education/vocation, family, substance use, mental health, attitudes and behaviors, aggression, skills, and associations. Partner/program availability, staffing, and our population size are factors that continue to challenge programming. DCYF has always sought to offer a sufficient array and number of programs to meet the complex needs of the JR population. We will continue to do so to ensure that young people have a variety of programs and supports

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		available for their rehabilitation, as funding allows. To this end, DCYF has recently launched a division-wide initiative to improve assessment and case management practices to better match young people to programs designed to address their needs and sentence length.
DCYF should match specific rehabilitative programs with each young person's individual needs.	X Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	A persistent tension exists between providing highly individualized interventions and maintaining cost-effective programming for a small and variable population. As noted above, this work is closely tied to broader challenges related to program availability. This tension is particularly evident in specialized offerings with very few eligible participants. For example, providing college programming for girls is strongly aligned with rehabilitative objectives, yet delivering a sustainable program for such a small cohort presents significant operational and fiscal challenges. Of note, DCYF has already implemented a college option for girls at Echo Glen. Overcrowding further constrains program delivery by limiting space, staffing, and scheduling flexibility, thereby reducing the system's capacity to individualize services as intended.
DCYF should collect and use accurate, reliable, and consistent data.	X Concur ☐ Partially Concur ☐ Do Not Concur	We are using an antiquated case management and incident reporting systems with limited modification ability. Previous requests for IT improvements have gone unfunded by the legislature but DCYF is committed to process improvement within limitations of, and subject to, available budget and resources.