
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

I'm sure you have seen the news release about the proposed Columbia Center for Youth and you are probably wondering about the timeline for the facility, funding, and how this will all work out. The new facility is a proposal – the Governor has placed funding in his proposed budget – and if the funding is approved, we will move forward in July. There are still many plans to be made and details to work out. If we receive the funding, we would anticipate moving youth into the facility in early 2011. This would allow our agency to reach two goals of our strategic plan – downsizing Swanson and regionalizing services.

Opening a facility may seem like an unusual step at a time when we have taken measures to reduce expenditures to balance this year's budget. The measures we took allow us to meet our mission while still living within our means. While we have had to reduce the budget, it is with our mission in mind – providing services to youth – that we seize this opportunity to move our reforms forward at minimal cost.

The proposed Columbia Center for Youth will be a great step forward in our reforms. It will allow us to open a facility completely immersed in Louisiana's model. The facility will be small, in line with the Missouri concept, and provide a therapeutic, moderate secure setting where youth can be rehabilitated. Like the three existing facilities, it will have an on-site school and operate under La MOD, with daily therapeutic group sessions to address identified needs. The existing physical plant is ideal for this type of operation.

Let me clarify the current and future budget situations. As you know, OJJ is facing a budget deficit, and we cannot overspend the amount left in our budget for the fiscal year ending June 30. We have had to deal with this year's budget while we are looking ahead at the budget for the new fiscal year that begins July 1.

This is a crucial transition for adjudicated youth. The agency has moved away from the large, institutionalized corrections system for adjudicated youth and is providing them with the guidance and rehabilitation they need closer to their homes, their families and the community to which they'll be returning. The Columbia site allows us to do that while reducing the Swanson population to a total of 190 youth – a 24 percent decrease.

We have done what was needed and put things in place this year to meet our financial responsibilities. Now it's time to re-adjust our focus to providing quality services to our kids. That said, we will fight hard to maintain the Governor's budget request, so that we can move forward with a plan to provide services to our youth. We have to move through the legislative process before we know for sure if we will move into Columbia. I will keep you informed of the process and let you know how it is looking as we move forward. In the meantime, as ever, thanks to every one of you for your unending efforts to meet the mission.

Sincerely,

“Doc” *Dr. Mary Livers*

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