

what's up doc?

by Dr. Mary Livers, PH.D, MSW, Deputy Secretary

Vol. 9, No. 13, April 15, 2016

Hello, Everyone:

Well, the budget has been grabbing all of the headlines lately, so I really have not had the chance to update you all on some of the other things going on. In 2003, Louisiana set out to reform its juvenile justice system after a federal lawsuit over conditions in secure care facilities. Reformers set out to treat young people in the least restrictive environment possible, and when they do need to be in secure care, make sure that it is a safe, therapeutic environment.

This year 4 bills have been introduced that represent the “second wave” of juvenile justice reform.

I mentioned the first to you earlier this week – **the Raise the Age Bill (SB 324)**. Louisiana is one of only 9 states that charges 17 year olds as adults. The research shows that 17 year olds are developmentally different from adults and have a better chance at rehabilitation. SB 324 phases 17 year olds into the juvenile system between July 1, 2018 and July 1, 2020. The Institute for Public Health and Justice has put out a report on the impact of this change. We are working closely with the legislature and Governor to make sure we have the resources to serve these young people.

The remaining bills are intended to increase accountability to make sure that the juvenile justice system is operating as it should be based on national best practices.

SB 301 Creates the Juvenile Justice Accountability and Cost Effectiveness Act of 2016. It calls for an extensive data set to be reported publicly by OJJ, as well as, the District Courts and detention centers.

SB 302 Creates the Safe and Fair Return Act of 2016. It sets forth revised laws on the way public defenders work with young people after they have been adjudicated into our custody.

SB 303 Creates a specialized system for measuring youth progress in the alternative schools located at OJJ facilities.

Just like the budget, these bills are still works in progress. Amendments are coming fast and furious, and there are hurdles for them to clear prior to becoming law. All of the changes mentioned in these bills may seem like more work for us. But, we need to keep in mind the original motivation for reform – the belief that young people in the juvenile justice system must be treated properly and are given the best chance for rehabilitation. The very thing that motivates us all to work so hard every day with the young people in our care.

I'll close with my sincere thanks to every member of the OJJ team, wherever you serve, for all you do every day to meet the mission.

Sincerely,

“Doc”

Dr. Mary Livers

