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Juvenile Justice Reform on Track in Ohio
Class Action Settlement Filed

COLUMBUS, OH – A comprehensive class action settlement has been filed today in federal court in Columbus, Ohio outlining reforms for the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS).

The system-wide scope of this agreement creates a long-term investment in Ohio youth by infusing new resources into DHS operations, overseeing reform in the process for determining when youth should be released from DHS custody, and supporting evidence-based community programs for low-risk offenders. Changes include hiring up to 115 Juvenile Correctional Officers as well as other staff in various areas of expertise, increasing training, and revising use of force, seclusion and discipline policies. The agreement also supports improved mental health services, enhanced educational, medical and dental services, and a capacity goal on the youth population. Although the final cost of implementing the agreement is still to be determined, it is estimated to annually increase the DHS budget between \$20 to \$30 million.

"The agreement turns a new corner in DHS history, and allows us to continue to aggressively move DHS forward in a meaningful way," said Department of Youth Services Director Tom Stickrath. "This settlement builds on the dedication and professionalism of our current workforce and provides them with additional tools to increase rehabilitation opportunities and safety within our facilities."

The attorneys who represent the youth confined in DHS facilities, including Al Gerhardstein, Kim Brooks-Tandy of the Children's Law Center, David Singleton and Janet Moore of the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, Jennifer Kinsley of Sirkin, Pinales, and Schwartz, and Maria Ramiu of the Youth Law Center, are pleased with the agreement. Gerhardstein stated, "I commend the State for joining in this comprehensive remedy. Not only does this plan outline action to reduce violence and make programming more appropriate, it also will ensure DHS is holding youth for an

appropriate length of time.” He continued, “In addition, the plan safeguards public safety while working toward more youth being served in smaller, more appropriate, community-based facilities. In this way we are following the lead of other states, using proven strategies.”

The settlement agreement resolves a class-action lawsuit that originated in December 2004 and was followed by the January 2008 consultant fact finding report. Attorneys for the youth, and state officials, worked collaboratively to negotiate the comprehensive settlement in order to respond promptly to the problems identified in the report and to avoid costly litigation.

The Ohio Department of Youth Services is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio. DYS is statutorily mandated to confine youth ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated delinquent of a felony-level offense and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. With an average population of 1,700, DYS operates eight correctional and rehabilitation facilities. DYS also oversees over a thousand youth on parole from six regional sites.

The settlement will not become effective until it is approved by the federal court. Once approved, consultant Fred Cohen will monitor the compliance of the agreement. A full copy of the draft settlement agreement and the fact finding report are available online at www.dys.ohio.gov.