

Governor Christie Announces Unprecedented Investment in Juvenile Justice System

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Two Aging Youth Prisons Closing, Two New Smaller Centers Being Built

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today announced the most significant reform of New Jersey’s juvenile justice system in modern history with a \$162 million bond financing to fund the closure of a civil war era youth prison - the New Jersey Training School, commonly known as Jamesburg in Monroe Township - as well as the Female Secure Care and Intake Facility, referred to as Hayes. Two much smaller state of the art juvenile rehabilitation centers are planned, one in Ewing Township, Mercer County and another in Winslow Township, Camden County. Each will hold between 40 and 72 residents.

This initiative represents the largest ever investment in New Jersey’s juvenile justice infrastructure and was made possible by New Jersey’s successful implementation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) that began in 2004 and has reduced the population at New Jersey’s juvenile detention centers by 68 percent, with admissions down 76 percent. Subsequent commitments to the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) have been reduced by 82 percent.

“The New Jersey Training School at Jamesburg is one of the oldest, most antiquated youth prisons in the nation and the time has come to close its gates for the last time,” said Governor Christie. “We have an obligation to serve our youth and protect our communities, but now we will do so using a model that maximizes opportunities for personal rehabilitation and growth of developing young people.”

Built in 1867 to house thousands of young people, and comprising 68 buildings sprawled over 900 acres, the Training School is no longer effective or sustainable. Thanks to New Jersey’s success in reducing youth incarceration, the Training School presently averages just 144 residents. Incarcerating this small number of youth on an aging and largely empty campus is inefficient, impractical, and expensive. The facility is in a remote location, with little, if any, access to public transportation - making family visits extremely difficult and severely limiting the critical role families can play in the care and rehabilitation of their loved ones.

With an annual budget appropriation of \$44.2 million, the cost to house a single resident at the Training School is staggering - more than \$300,000 per resident per year. Attorney General Christopher S. Porrino has contrasted the cost to more than four years at Harvard, including room and board, with enough cash left over to purchase a luxury car as a graduation gift.

The investment required to construct these new facilities will be offset by approximately \$20 million a year in savings in ongoing operation costs at Jamesburg and Hayes. These savings can be applied to support additional therapeutic and delinquency prevention services. They will further enhance community safety and serve youth and their families before they have contact with the juvenile justice system in the first place.

“We’ve worked hard to reach this milestone, overcoming numerous political, logistical, and legal challenges, in service of juveniles who have entered our juvenile justice system. With the closure of a civil war era youth prison, the construction of state of the art rehabilitation centers, and cost savings that can be repurposed for education and reentry of juvenile offenders, there is no question we will have better outcomes,” said Attorney General Porrino.

These efforts are supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Advocates for Children of New Jersey, and the Institute for Social Justice.

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"New Jersey is nationally recognized for its success in safely reducing the number of youths who are incarcerated and for implementing community-based alternatives to detention," said Kevin M. Brown, JJC Executive Director. "This complete overhaul of New Jersey's juvenile secure settings is precedent setting and will prompt others to follow throughout the country, just as they followed our lead in drastically reducing the number of pre-sentenced juveniles held in secure settings through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative."

The New Jersey State House Commission approved the plan on December 7, 2017, with the subsequent approval of the Economic Development Authority on December 12, 2017. The New Jersey Joint State Leasing and Space Utilization Committee gave the final approval to the plan on December 18, 2017 and the bond financing closed on January 8, 2018.

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