



THOMAS F. O'MALLEY
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

**COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
JUVENILE DIVISION**

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Dear Judge Adrine and Members of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee,

We have watched your committee meetings with vibrant and sustained interest. We are truly grateful that you dedicated precious time and care to examine the Juvenile Justice system in Cuyahoga County. Through the effective presentation of participant testimony and your incisive consistency of inquiry, your committee captured the essential complexity and limitless challenges of our Court. Watching the testimony of our staff and community partners reinforced my enduring belief that our staff and partners have established themselves as the most diligent, selfless, and uniformly dedicated professionals whom you will ever encounter or observe.

Juvenile Court is unique among Courts – we treat children who have often committed serious offenses. Concurrently, those same children are victimized habitually by unbridled abuse and neglect. Regrettably, they have been raised in home environments where their parents have too often experienced incarceration, domestic violence, homelessness, and pernicious mental health and substance abuse problems. In short, the Juvenile Court is a daily witness to every societal ill.

We are exceedingly proud of the work which we assume and perform with consistent excellence at Juvenile Court. In a parallel manner, your committee should be ardently applauded for your decision to highlight the vast array of services currently utilized by the Court to provide critical and invaluable assistance to children and families. And yet, as we were privileged to share with you when you graciously visited our Court on November 11, 2024, there is much more that we can and should undertake.

Pursuant to your request in our November meeting, below appears a list of needs which, if provided, would not merely improve the effectiveness of the Court. In essence, these resources would enhance and ensure policing and community safety. Most importantly, the ability to implement these vital resources would improve the lives and futures of the children in Cuyahoga County immeasurably.

1. Residential Treatment Funding

- Residential treatment allows the Court to treat youth in more therapeutic environments, preventing commitments to ODYS whose recidivism rates are 80%.
- Treatment in a therapeutic environment allows youth to address root causes of delinquency and increases family engagement.

- Court officers provide aftercare services to ensure a successful transition and reintegration to the home and community upon release.

Benefits

- Better treatment outcomes and lower recidivism as compared with sending a youth to ODYS.
- Decreasing commitments to ODYS increases the Court's RECLAIM allocation from the State.
- Residential treatment for Title IV-E eligible youth at most treatment facilities is reimbursed by the Federal Government at a rate of 64.6%.

2024 Cost: \$1.4 Million

Request for 2026: \$2 Million

2. Alternative to Detention Continuum – Respite Homes – Trauma-informed Group homes – Dedicated Secure Residential Beds

- The Court's current detention continuum consists of detention, two respite homes and electronic monitoring. Additionally, the Court admits youth with low level charges who are in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services.
- Access to additional Respite Homes, Trauma-informed Group Homes and Dedicated Secure Residential Beds would allow the Court to provide a much-needed short-term intervention for youth with low level charges and youth who violate home detention

Benefits

- Alternatives to detention allow the Court to keep youth low-level offenses out of detention and away from the influence of youth with more serious charges. Research overwhelmingly shows that mixing these groups does great harm and significantly increases the recidivism of low-level offenders.
- Detention can be traumatic, leading to increased anxiety, depression, or PTSD. Smaller, home-like settings, or small group settings meet the short-term need of low-level offenders without causing long-term consequences and stigma.
- Youth in Respite Homes and Trauma-informed Group Homes attend their home school and so maintain educational continuity while also maintaining the positive, supportive social connections that exist in the school.
- This is an intervention overwhelmingly supported by Police Departments. A short-term placement at a Respite Home or Trauma-informed Group Home decreases the number of repeat visits officers must make to homes for low-level family issues.
- A shelter continuum would keep low-level offenders in custody of CCDCFS out of detention. Currently, the only low-level offenders who gain admission to our Detention Center are those without parents. These are the neediest children in

our community and the ones for whom we should work the hardest to avoid detention, but instead, with no parent and no CCDCFS placement, these children are placed in detention, often doing great harm.

2024 Cost: \$74,015.13 (Respite Homes only)

Request for 2026: \$1 million

3. Greater Coordination of Services between systems – Care First Cuyahoga

- Cuyahoga County does a decent job coordinating services for youth on the verge of removal from the home. Prior to the catastrophic failure of a family that is the removal of a child, coordination is haphazard at best and nonexistent at worst.
- By the time a child enters the juvenile justice system, the youth and family have touched other systems multiple times, often dozens of times. The children the Court meets at 14 or 15 have often experienced years of school failure, years of mental health and substance abuse, family dysfunction that includes physical abuse, witnessing domestic violence, incarceration, substance abuse, homelessness and mental health problems. These societal problems cannot be “fixed” by the Court alone. The problems must be addressed by the community.
- Care First Cuyahoga is an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Grant that will help our community identify the gaps and create a plan to fill those gaps with collaboration and services that will increase coordination and address family needs at the earliest possible point.

Benefits

- Closing gaps and moving collaboration and coordination to the earliest point will improve the lives of our families and prevent them from penetrating deeper into both the justice system and child welfare.

2024 Cost: 0

Request for 2026: To be determined after OJJDP planning year concludes

4. Provide Court with funding for 15 additional probation officers enabling caseloads to decrease to 21

- When all current Probation Officer positions are filled, caseloads will average 21 youth per Probation Officer.
- 80% of the youth on probation have a felony level charge which requires a higher level of supervision and services.
- In contrast to the adult system, the Juvenile Court serves the whole family, not just the court-involved youth. This complexity requires smaller caseloads as the Probation officers supports and refers other family members to resources and services.

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation recommends that Probation Officers carry a caseload of 8-12 youth to be most effective at case planning and supervision. Lower caseloads allow probation officers to analyze complex cases, refer to appropriate services, facilitate team meetings, collaborate with community, engage youth and families in setting realistic and attainable expectations and goals, and finally, to coach youth to use cognitive behavioral skills.

Benefits

- Smaller caseloads can reduce reoffending by 10% simply through more time spent by the Probation Officer on each case.
- Lower caseloads will help us attract and retain skilled, dedicated staff.
- Additional Probation Officers will lower the time needed between adjudication and disposition. This will move youth and families to treatment services faster and it will reduce the length of stay in our Detention Center. A reduced length of stay will reduce the average daily population, which in turn increases safety in the detention center for youth and staff.

2024 Cost: 0

Request for 2026: \$1.2 million

5. Create juvenile delinquency prevention program that focuses on 9 – 11-year-old youth in the custody of Children and Family Services

- Aging out of child welfare is a very poor outcome for a child. However, an even worse outcome is aging out while incarcerated. Many of the youth the Court commits to ODYS, or transfers to adult court, have had an episode of custody in their life.
- An intervention for our most vulnerable children and for whom our community is responsible, is a moral imperative.

Benefits

- The Fostering Healthy Futures (FHF) program, a 30-week mentoring and skills group preventive intervention for preadolescent maltreated children in foster care that has shown promising results in decreasing foster care-to-prison pipeline.

2024 Cost: 0

Request for 2026: \$162,000 in implementation year

6. Police drop-off/intervention center

- A common problem for police departments across the county is spending hours trying to find an adult to whom they may release a youth.

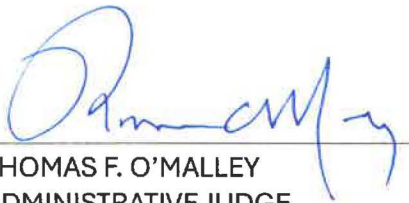
- A drop-off center would allow the police to decrease their time processing youth, allowing them to return to patrol.
- A drop-off center would also allow the Court to provide an immediate assessment and interventions that will decrease repeat arrests.

Benefits

- This intervention would meet a need that law enforcement has identified for which they have requested a solution for decades.
- Increase police time spent on patrol. Decrease police time spent waiting at stations.
- Immediate intervention is effective intervention. The Court would identify an intervention within hours of the incident.

2024 Cost: 0

Request for 2026: \$50,000 for planning year to engage Cuyahoga County Police Departments and community partners in developing a comprehensive plan.



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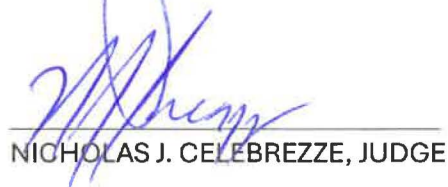
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