



Warren C. Evans Wayne County Executive

March 7, 2025

Honorable John Roth
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services
House Office Building
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Chairman Roth:

I write to express my support for your committee's public hearings to discuss the challenges facing Michigan's juvenile delinquency system. As you are no doubt aware, my administration has been heavily focused on the shortage of state-licensed juvenile beds for delinquent youth. I have personally written to Governor Whitmer on this matter, and members of my administration have written to the leaders of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) on a number of occasions outlining the systematic failure of DHHS to ensure adequate services to delinquent youth. Additionally, in March 2023, Wayne County's Deputy County Executive and Health Officer jointly testified at the Senate Judiciary Committee on this issue.

Although our discussions with the Governor's leadership team have been constructive, DHHS has made minimal operational progress to date and the department's inaction is directly creating a public safety problem in Wayne County. Most alarmingly, the lack of progress is depriving delinquent youth of the treatment services they badly need and to which they are legally entitled. It has been two years since our public testimony and the only fair description of the current situation is "completely unacceptable." DHHS should be held accountable for producing tangible results.

The County has directly witnessed DHHS systematically drive longstanding non-profit partners from the business of residential youth placement while providing no viable alternative. Wayne and other counties throughout the state have borne the weight of these state-initiated actions. During the past several years, we have routinely housed up to 50 or more children at the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility who are awaiting out-of-home placements. This is in addition to the youth in our facility appropriately awaiting adjudication. It has been more than three years since we raised these issues with DHHS. Unfortunately, despite their numerous promises, efforts to expand out-of-home placement capacity have yielded only minimal benefits.

I sincerely hope your fact-finding effort yields a robust public discussion regarding DHHS' commitment to vulnerable youth. Though our direct concern is the breakdown of the juvenile delinquency placement system, we are similarly worried about behavioral health and abuse/neglect

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March 7, 2025

Page 2

services provided to our county's children. We are aware of challenges on those fronts as well and remain concerned that DHHS is not demonstrating the urgency to fix these critical problems.

We believe that three things are critical to ensure DHHS makes sustained progress toward resolving the longstanding problem of residential placement beds.

1. The House should appropriate funds to build new residential capacity and renovate existing facilities to add at least 200 new beds statewide.
2. The House should seek to ascertain how DHHS' regulatory practices have driven longstanding non-profit partners from the business of residential placements and precluded new partners from initiating these services.
3. The House should seek to ascertain whether DHHS has begun to place children who are adjudicated as PA 150 delinquent wards into out-of-state residential placements. If DHHS has elected to take this step, we believe this is a very risky and ill-advised strategy. We are far more supportive of steps to invest in reviving the state's once rich network of local residential placement agencies.
4. The legislature should schedule ongoing oversight hearings to ensure that DHHS is making progress to add new residential beds and reform its administrative practices that have led to so many ongoing program closures.

This is an urgent matter impacting vulnerable children all over the state of Michigan. Counties and courts have been impacted in every region of the state. It is time to take purposeful action and hold leaders accountable for resolving this issue, which has gone on far too long. Thank you for your consideration of the issues we have raised in this letter. I look forward to future discussions.

Sincerely,



Warren C. Evans
County Executive

CC: Hon. Matt Hall, Speaker of the House
Hon. Ranjeev Pouri, Minority Leader
Hon. Ann Bollin, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Hon. Alabas Farhat, Vice-Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Sydney Brown, Clerk of the Committee