

From: DYS Communications <Communications@dys.ohio.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 4, 2022 3:42 PM

To: DYS Agency <DYSAgency@dys.ohio.gov>

Subject: Announcement from Director Ast



Department of Youth Services

Mike DeWine, Governor
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor

Amy L. Ast, Director

November 4, 2022

To All DYS Staff,

First, let me take this opportunity to thank all the amazing staff who show up every day, who work long hours in our units, recreation departments, schools, dining halls, clinics, maintenance areas, and behavioral health departments. Additionally, I want to thank our human resources staff and the administrative staff who have worked hard to onboard new staff and who continue their efforts to close the gap on our vacancies. I also want to acknowledge our parole staff, training academy staff, central office staff, and facility administrative staff who have been assisting with coverage during these unprecedented times in our agency.

Many of you recognize that our population in DYS has increased throughout this year. In fact, our population is higher than it was the year before the pandemic. This increase has impacted all three of our facilities, and it is not lost on me that the increase in population, combined with the staff shortage, has made for more challenging environments.

My work with juvenile court judges on the utilization of [community corrections facilities](#) as an alternative to DYS commitments will continue, as will our efforts to identify appropriate DYS youth who can be stepped down into a less restrictive environment. To date, 25 youth have been identified and transfers have begun. Additionally, we have 55 youth whose circumstances warrant approval for release and that process is underway. These strategies to reduce our population, along with others, will be on-going.

Your ongoing commitment to DYS has contributed significantly to the youth who are committed to fulfilling the expectations of the court, meeting the goals outlined in their treatment plans, and not engaging in harm to others. Because of your good work, approximately 80% of our youth have not been involved in acts of violence on our staff or on their peers.

Having said that, the remaining 15%-20% of youth in our custody present a continuing concern, especially given the increase in serious and targeted assaults we've been experiencing. Accordingly, my leadership team and I have been reviewing our policies and the tools needed to create the safe facility environments our staff and youth deserve. Please see the following actions that I have approved.

- **Body Worn Cameras (BWC)** – This week we completed the final draft policy for body worn cameras. With assistance from our partners at the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, we will begin finalizing the training and implementation plans for the use of body worn cameras at our Indian River facility in the coming weeks. As soon as we receive our complete supply of cameras, we will plan for training and implementation at our other two facilities. Youth Specialists, Unit Managers, Unit Manager Administrators, Operations Managers, and Operations Administrators will be issued body worn cameras as part of their daily security issued equipment. The desired outcome of introducing body worn cameras will be to promote safety and transparency, but more importantly, it will illustrate and capture events from the perspective of our staff.
- **OC Spray (Oleoresin Capsicum)** – I have developed a charter and will be creating a multi-disciplinary committee (Medical, Behavioral Health, Operations, Legal, Union Partners, Advocates, etc.) that will convene next week to review and revise the current use-of-force policy and use-of-force continuum. Additionally, the committee will be responsible for ensuring all applicable professional standards (ACA, PREA, PBS, etc.) are included in the review. Once I approve the finalized policy and training curriculum, an implementation plan will be developed.
 - Research has shown in environments like ours, the use of OC spray is much safer than physical restraint. The goal of adding this tool for designated facility staff is to reduce injuries to staff who by policy relied on the use of physical restraint. The use of OC Spray will reduce injuries to staff and youth, as well as reduce the frequency of staff being off work due to physical restraint injuries. This will also increase youth compliance and decrease the occurrences of youth earning additional time and additional charges for engaging in acts of violence. This will increase safety and increase the likelihood of youth being released on time.

My decision to introduce these new security tools is to enhance your ability to better manage our increased population of youth who come to us with challenging needs. These tools are not meant to replace our foundational intervention strategies that are steeped in research (i.e., relationship building, utilizing verbal strategies, mentorship, behavioral health interventions, etc.). Our policy and your professional training will equip you with the decisional balance of knowing when these tools are appropriate for the situations you will encounter. With the introduction of these new tools, I am confident that it will help to increase safety in our facilities, and I will continue to evaluate and introduce other promising practices that will help us achieve the department's mission.

Sincerely,



Amy L. Ast, Director

Every youth will have an opportunity to achieve their potential. What we invest in is what we value.