



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Andy Beshear  
GOVERNOR

Capitol Building, Suite 100  
700 Capitol Avenue  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601  
(502) 564-2611  
Fax: (502) 564-2517

January 5, 2023

Honorable John Schickel  
State Senator  
Capital Annex, Room 281  
702 Capital Avenue  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Senator Schickel:

I have received your correspondence of January 3<sup>rd</sup> and appreciate your concerns regarding the Commonwealth's juvenile justice system.

As you undoubtedly know, we have experienced a number of disturbing occurrences in our juvenile detention facilities, particularly over the last few months. The violent attacks on both staff and youth are unacceptable and I have initiated certain actions to make these facilities safer. I know that is a goal that you and I share.

The causes of these increasingly violent occurrences are many and complex. Our juvenile detention system was designed decades ago, for a different time. Unfortunately, it is not well suited to meet today's challenging environment. The system as implemented twenty years ago valued detaining youths close to home, a laudable goal. Unfortunately, the negative by-products of the system now outweigh its benefits. Specifically, the "old" system required keeping youths in the same facility regardless of gender or severity of alleged offense. In practical terms, this means that we are housing truants and runaways along with those charged with horrific crimes of violence, often gang related.

The challenges are exacerbated by chronic staffing shortages, aging facilities and staff that are often ill-equipped to deal with the level of violence in our detention centers. The disturbances we have experienced and their aftermath endangers both the youth in our custody and our staff. Under these circumstances, it is often impossible to provide the services to our youth that they badly need. These circumstances led me to direct the changes in the outdated system that are currently in process.

Senator John Schickel  
January 5, 2023  
PAGE TWO

We have already provided significant compensation increases designed to assist in the recruitment and retention of adequate staff. While we have seen some success in this regard, more must be done. I directed that we separate youths in detention according to alleged offense level. Youths charged with the most serious offenses, Class C felonies and above, will be detained in high security facilities that we will tailor to that purpose. As we implement this change, we will train and equip staff to better deal with this level of alleged offender and we will implement policies and procedures designed to safely house this segment of our detained population.


I also directed that youths be separated by gender in order to better protect girls in detention. The increasingly aggressive population in detention made this decision necessary.

I understand that there will be short term difficulties, such as transportation, arising from these decisions. I have instructed the Department of Juvenile Justice to design a plan to reduce any additional burden on local law enforcement and we will move expeditiously to implement the plan as resources are identified. I also understand that these decisions mean that some youths will be detained farther from home and I do not take this consequence lightly.

The security and safety of our detention centers is fundamental, however, and the changes I have directed are necessary to achieve that aim. My administration will work to minimize any disruption resulting from these changes, but the safety of the youth in our custody as well as our staff is paramount. Once fully implemented, the changes we are making will result in safer, more secure facilities and better circumstances for both youth and staff.

The challenges we face are complex and have been years in the making. Meeting those challenges will likely require additional resources, innovative policies, and legislative action. I look forward to working with the General Assembly as we do what is necessary to protect our youth and staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andy Beshear". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "B".

Andy Beshear  
Governor