



Testimony of Larry G. Brown
Executive Deputy Commissioner
New York State Office of Children & Family Services

to the

New York State Assembly Standing Committees on
Children and Families and Codes

Monday, December 18, 2006
10:30 AM

250 Broadway
Assembly Hearing Room 1923, 19th Floor
New York City

State of New York



George E. Pataki, Governor

Chairman Scarborough, Chairman Lentol and distinguished members of the Legislature, I am pleased to appear before you today to provide testimony on the programs and services offered at the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' (OCFS) juvenile residential facilities and day-placement centers serving youth remanded to the care of OCFS.

We are proud of how far we have come over the past years to help address the needs of youth placed in OCFS's care. At the same time, I would like to acknowledge that the complexity and multitude of issues that many youth have at the time of placement in OCFS facilities present exciting challenges and opportunities for ongoing improvements and overall changes in the way that we provide services in the State's juvenile justice system. This requires the support and collaboration of many partners.

I. Overview

I know you share my belief and that of everyone at OCFS, that the youth of New York State are one of our most valued assets. Today's children are our future leaders, captains of industry and innovators. At OCFS, we take every opportunity available to help nurture and protect this vulnerable population so that they may be able to live healthy, safe and productive lives.

As you know, OCFS was established in 1998 to bridge the gap between child welfare and juvenile justice policy and practices, and to improve, strengthen, and integrate services to the state's children, youth, and other vulnerable populations.

Executive Law Section 504(a) provides that the division (OCFS) shall operate and maintain secure, limited secure and non-secure facilities for the care, custody, treatment, housing, education, rehabilitation and guidance of youth placed with or committed to the division (OCFS).

OCFS is directly responsible for the operation, supervision and management of 31 residential facilities, two reception centers, six community residential homes, and eight day-placement centers. The agency also supports and monitors detention, aftercare and a range of community-based programs.

II. How Youth Come to OCFS Placement

Research has shown that many factors contribute to juvenile delinquency.¹ These factors can be categorized as:

- ◆ Individual factors, including early antisocial behavior, emotional/mental health factors and substance abuse;
- ◆ Family factors, including child abuse and neglect, family violence, and parental psychopathology;

¹ Wasserman, et al., 2003; Snyder, et al., 2003; Huizinga, et al., 2000; Patchin, et al., 2006

- ◆ Peer factors such as association with deviant peers and peer rejection;
- ◆ School factors, including failure to bond to school and poor school performance; and
- ◆ Community factors such as poverty, concentration of delinquent peer groups and access to weapons).

Of particular relevance to OCFS is research conducted in Rochester, New York within the last decade that documents direct links between childhood maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. Another study found that youth who were victims of childhood maltreatment were twice as likely as youth who were not maltreated to engage in delinquent behavior in early adolescence and 1.75 times as likely to be delinquent in late adolescence. A longitudinal study conducted in 2001 based on data from a midwestern city found that child abuse and neglect increased the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59%, as an adult by 28%, and for a violent crime by 30%.²

OCFS serves male and female youth from the ages of 11 up to 21 who are remanded into the care and custody of OCFS by the family courts or committed by the criminal courts. Generally, youth placed with OCFS come to us presenting serious issues and many have extensive histories of prior placements. They present complex issues, many of which compromise their own personal well-being and public safety.

All youth placed with OCFS come to us either adjudicated as *juvenile delinquents* by the family court system or as designated felons sentenced through the criminal court as *juvenile offenders*. Juvenile delinquents are defined in Section 301.2 of the Family Court Act as persons over the age of 7, but under the age of 16, who have committed what would be crimes against persons, including assault, robbery and sexual offenses. In addition, these young people are responsible for crimes against property, such as arson.

Youth who are placed as juvenile delinquents have committed an act, which would have been a crime if committed by an adult. The Department of Probation is responsible for preparing a pre-dispositional report, for family court and in most cases, recommends the youth's placement with OCFS. In most instances, the youth are remanded to detention while awaiting the outcome of the court process. Once placed, youth are admitted from statewide juvenile detention facilities to the care and custody of OCFS. The process with juvenile offenders is similar. However, the case is processed in adult criminal court.

A significant number of these youth have committed crimes against persons, including assault, robbery and sexual offenses. In addition, these youth are responsible for crimes against property, such as arson. A Juvenile Offender / Restrictive Juvenile Delinquent is defined as a person between 13 and 15 years of age who has committed a serious crime that, if committed by an adult, would be a "designated felony." The list of "designated felonies" is similar to the Penal Law list of violent felonies, which includes crimes such as: assault in the first degree, manslaughter in the first degree, and rape in the first degree.

To provide treatment to this very complex population, OCFS offers a wide range of programs. After a full assessment and screening, including record review at reception, youth are placed in

² Widom and Maxwell, 2001

the least restrictive setting that best matches their custody requirements and program service needs. Facilities meet or exceed the National American Correctional Association standards of best practice and quality services.

The assessment of youth is the first step in the planning process. OCFS has two reception centers for youth entering the state's juvenile rehabilitative system. The boys' reception center is located in the Bronx; the girls' reception center is located on the Tryon Campus in Johnstown. Standardized assessment instruments are used to evaluate presenting issues and placement needs of the youth, including screening in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, education, sex offender, limited English proficiency and health.

Each youth receives an individualized treatment plan designed to address his/her unique needs.

III. Demographics: Characteristics of Youth In Care

Many youth that are remanded into the care of OCFS facilities come into placement with complex and severe problems including histories of alcohol and substance abuse, truancy, mental illness, domestic violence, gang involvement and criminality. OCFS statistics support these findings.

Approximately nine out of 10 youth entering the OCFS facilities are found at Intake screening to have at least one special service need: substance abuse (70%), mental health (57%), special education (18%), with an additional 32% identified while at the facility, health (52%) and/or sex offender (12 %). They require full complements of trained staff that can intervene and "manage" these young people in a residential setting comprised largely of youth with severe presenting issues.

As of September 2006, there were a total of 2,104 youth in care within OCFS facilities and aftercare programs, plus another 808 placed in authorized voluntary agencies.

Similar to other states in the nation, minorities are disproportionately represented in New York State's juvenile justice system. Approximately 59% of these youth are African American, 26% Hispanic, 13% Caucasian. Eighty-three percent of youth in care are male compared to the 17% of females. Approximately 60% of our residents are from New York City and approximately 40% are from the rest of New York State.

The issue of disproportionality raises many serious policy and practice concerns within the juvenile justice system. In 2002, OCFS established a Disproportionate Minority Representation (DMR) Committee consisting of interdepartmental representatives from OCFS's Divisions of Development & Prevention Services, Administration, Rehabilitative Services and Legal Affairs, as well as stakeholders from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, for the sole purpose of identifying opportunities to address the complex issues around DMR in both the child welfare arena and juvenile justice system. In addition, last month, OCFS staff met with the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) to discuss New York's experiences and assist in a national study of this issue.

Academically, youth admitted to OCFS residential facilities are significantly behind their peers in the public schools. OCFS youth range from several years behind in reading and math to being non-readers. These children have generally been out of school for extended periods of time. During their placement with OCFS, we see vast improvements in reading and math skills. Youth generally improve at least two grade levels, as measured by the Woodcock Johnson testing instrument.

Currently, 50% of youth in OCFS facilities have been identified as needing special education services.

Over the past several years, crimes against persons (assault, homicide, kidnapping, robbery, sexual offense) have accounted for approximately 45% of admissions. Another 33% of admissions are due to crimes against property, 7% for possession of a controlled substance, 7% for possession of a firearm, and the remaining 8% for other various crimes.

OCFS strives to place youth in the least restrictive setting necessary. Generally, most youth admitted to OCFS residential care require limited secure settings, based upon their delinquent histories and presenting needs at Intake.

IV. Overview of OCFS Staffing and Training

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff are essential to quality programming and services in OCFS's residential facilities. Approximately 2300 employees are responsible for the management and provision of treatment services for close to 3000 court placed youth in OCFS residential facilities. The facilities and programs operate 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Direct care staff are responsible for the daily management of youth placed with OCFS. Teachers are responsible for providing New York State Education Department approved curricula to all facility youth during a 5 ½ hour school day. Medical and clinical staff provide the medical and mental health management for youth in placement, including 16-hour-a-day medical coverage for the management of youth on psychotropic medication, and the operation of seven discrete mental health units across the state.

A well-trained staff, especially line staff with daily responsibility for the care of OCFS youth, is essential to the efficient operation of the state's juvenile justice system. OCFS invests significant resources in comprehensive and ongoing training to staff. All staff working directly with youth attend a five-week Basic Academy Training at our Parker Training Academy. The courses included in the basic academy training are designed to prepare new staff for working with youth by providing them with a foundation of information on youth development, management techniques, safety procedures, cultural awareness, programming of youth, agency policies and procedures, and general employment information. All direct care staff are trained in crisis management, de-escalation techniques and physical restraint management. Staff are required to participate in an additional mandatory 40 hours of training annually. The annual training includes refreshers for continuing certification in first aid, CPR, and other specialized programs. Support staff attend 17 hours of refresher training each year, receiving information specific to their functions.

V. OCFS Facilities

OCFS provides a wide range of programs across three levels of security (secure, limited secure and non-secure), as well as a variety of alternative community placement options. After a full assessment and screening at reception, youth are placed in the least restrictive setting that best matches their custody requirements and program service needs. All OCFS facilities provide clean, safe, secure and orderly operations that meet or exceed the National American Correctional Association standards of best practices and quality services. A range of program services is provided to address individual youth needs, and offers opportunities for the positive development of youth while they are in OCFS care and custody.

I would now like to provide additional details concerning the differences in the security levels within OCFS's juvenile justice system.

A. Differences in Levels of Security

Secure Facilities

The secure facilities provide the highest level of security with enhanced staffing, perimeter fencing, exterior lighting and increased security precautions. The majority of youth admitted to secure facilities are sentenced by the criminal courts as juvenile offenders (JO) or juvenile offender/youthful offender (JO/YO). The majority of youth released from secure facilities receive post-placement supervision from the New York State Division of Parole.

Limited Secure Residential Centers

The limited secure facilities are also equipped with a perimeter fence, exterior lighting, enhanced staffing and increased security precautions. Limited secure residential centers provide the most restrictive service setting for the juvenile delinquent population, sentenced by the family court. Youth released from limited secure facilities generally are provided re-entry services by OCFS community-based staff.

Non-Secure Residential Centers

The non-secure level of placement consists of a variety of urban and rural residential centers that range in size from the 60-bed Allen Residential Center to 25-bed facilities. Typically, family courts designate youth for placement in non-secure residential centers when they have committed offenses that require their removal from the community, but do not require the more restrictive setting of a limited secure facility. The smaller, 25-bed facilities provide a more home-like rehabilitative setting, focused programming and shortened lengths of stay.

Community Residential Homes

Six Community Residential Homes across the state serve youth adjudicated as juvenile delinquents requiring transitional services before returning to the community.

B. Programming in Facilities

Youth in OCFS residential care receive, and are expected to actively participate in, a variety of services and programs, which include counseling, health, mental health, substance abuse, education, recreation, employment services, ministerial services and programs to address special needs.

Health Care: A team of professional healthcare staff throughout the state addresses the health care needs of youth placed in OCFS custody. The Bureau of Health Services is responsible for medical oversight of the system. The goals of the program are to provide quality medical and dental services, communicable disease control, and effective prevention and management services for all youth. These goals are met with OCFS physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, registered nurses and dentists, as well as several contracted health professionals and health services.

Education and Job Training: We know that young people leaving OCFS facilities must have supports available to them upon their return to the community. Key to their success upon re-entry to their community is the ability to compete in the labor force. OCFS has implemented several initiatives to enhance the occupational skill levels and training of youth in care so that they are better prepared to compete in today's technologically advanced labor market.

All youth in OCFS residential facilities are required to attend classes during the regular school year and during the summer months. This intensive educational programming has resulted in significant improvements in the academic functioning of OCFS residents. Upon entering OCFS placement, two-thirds of youth score below grade level in reading and over 90% score below grade level in math. During their placement, many youth improve their reading and math skills to the point that they reach "grade level." In addition, two-thirds of the youth taking the GED exam during OCFS placement pass, which is higher than the statewide rate for all youth. In the 2005-06 school year, 335 of our youth took the GED examination, with a pass rate of 75%. The overall New York State passing rate was 55%. Furthermore, between July 2005 and July 2006, 580 of our residents re-enrolled in public school, with another 50 beginning college or training programs.

Additional initiatives that OCFS has implemented over the years aimed at helping our young people acquire the necessary basic and work skills to meet rising occupational demands include:

- ◆ Retooling our training programs to respond to the needs of business.
- ◆ Partnering with private industry to provide youth with the necessary vocational skills and tools they'll need when they leave one of our facilities.
- ◆ Expanding our professional certification programs from major employers and associations.
- ◆ Developing a Youth Portfolio that each youth completes to showcase his or her talents.

Mental Health: The numbers of youth with psychiatric disorders in custody nationwide in the juvenile justice system pose a significant challenge to those faced with identifying and responding to their needs. OCFS remains committed to addressing the mental health needs of youth in our care. Youth have access to effective treatment and support. OCFS Mental Health Units [a collaborative effort between OCFS and the Office of Mental Health (OMH)] use state-of-the-art medications, psychotherapies, evidence-based practice, and emerging best practices. Currently, 336 youth in OCFS care are taking psychotropic medications. It has been estimated that the rate of serious mental illnesses in this population is about three to four times that of the general population. Concurrently, those with substance abuse issues as co-occurring conditions are a significant proportion of the population of the youth we serve. Therefore, additional clinical positions are necessary and essential to meet the rising needs of this special population.

Substance Abuse: Many youth in OCFS facilities have experimented with or were users of drugs and illegal substances. During the intake process, it is identified that approximately 70% of the population require substance abuse services. We have established discreet substance abuse units, engaged contractors to provide services to OCFS youth, and have provided for drug and illegal substance abuse counseling in facility programs. However, the current resources available to OCFS do not adequately meet the increased demand for substance abuse treatment and services of youth in OCFS's residential facilities.

Services for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender Youth: Even as we attempt to address the complex needs and services for our youth, there are additional considerations we face in meeting the unique needs of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender youth (GLBT). We are seeing an increase in youth in our system who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. OCFS, together with Dr. Gerald Mallon, nationally and internationally recognized GLBT expert, has developed *Guidelines for Good Childcare Practices with GLBT Youth*. The *Guidelines* specify expectations for residential settings based on principles of sound professional and culturally competent practices, and promote consistency throughout OCFS facilities. Over the past several years OCFS, along with Dr. Mallon, has trained staff in over 10 residential facilities. OCFS provided a four-hour GLBT Satellite Broadcast Training for administration and staff statewide. All facility administrators who work with this population are required to attend these trainings sessions. Special care and attention is given to addressing the unique needs of GLBT youth when they are transitioning back into the community.

Office of the Ombudsman: OCFS maintains an Ombudsman unit with staff who are responsible for assisting youth in the custody of OCFS with questions and issues regarding their legal rights, quality of life issues in facility care as well as access to their court appointed legal representatives and the Courts in general. Currently staffed with an attorney and an administrative assistant, the Ombudsman unit responds to written and telephonic inquiries from residents and their families on issues of concern. They monitor the youth grievance process, review proposed policy, regulatory and statutory matters affecting the rights of youth in custody, and meet monthly with senior administrative staff in OCFS's Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). Staff of the Ombudsman unit conduct facility visits and on-site interviews with residents.

Independent Living Skills Development Program (ILS): At present, there are 30 Independent Living Skills Programs, consisting of the Community Reintegration Programs, the Evening Reporting Centers, the majority of the Community Service Programs, and Community-Based Organizations. All sites are given resources to support their programs and personal computers and other equipment to present the ILS program to the youth. An annual ILS Symposium is held to collectively gather input from the ILS Facilitators and look for new strategies to present the ILS program.

Behavior Management: Many of the youth entering our system demonstrate anti-authority perceptions and maladaptive behaviors, such as acting out and being assaultive. These youth lack the basic pro-social skills necessary to solve problems effectively. Many of these youth have gang affiliations and present a danger to other youth and staff.

OCFS residential programs are highly structured for safety and security accountability, and predictability through scheduling for both youth and staff. The OCFS system is designed to help youth learn and experience progress while they are in residential care. Youth earn privileges and recognition and achieve independence. Prescriptive Programming, a treatment directed model, is the case management system used at Intake, Residential Rehabilitation, Release Readiness and for community re-entry. Appropriate adjustments to programming and level of supervision can be made to facilitate optimal growth.

In the past few years, OCFS has changed its counseling philosophy to include strength and evidence based principles and an asset building approach. We believe our youth have strengths and assets, which warrant further development. This has been a change in the juvenile justice culture, which in the past, often focused on deficits and change.

VI. Discharge Planning and Aftercare

OCFS understands the value of solid transitional planning and post residential community services for residents leaving our facilities. Aftercare includes family engagement and planning for re-entry into the community.

Aftercare programs include: Evening Reporting Centers, Electronic Monitoring, Family Advocacy, Intake, Foster Care and an Intensive Aftercare Program. Contract providers offer evidence based and wraparound service interventions for youth in Aftercare. These programs include: Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC), Multi-systemic Therapy (MST), Back To Your Future (BTYF), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), Adolescent Portable Therapy (APT), Children's Aid Society (Boys and Girls Club), and Youth Advocacy Program (YAP).

Timely Re-enrollment in School: Of paramount concern is the expeditious re-enrollment of youth leaving our facilities into the public school system. It is of utmost importance to OCFS that our residents are prepared to return to school, are reenrolled by the public school system

without delay upon discharge, and receive academic credit for the work they complete while in the OCFS facility education program.

We have been working in collaboration with the New York State Education Department to finalize agreements, which would expedite reenrollment for youth back into the New York City Public School System. This “memo of understanding” will pave the way for this expeditious re-enrollment of youth back into the public educational system. We have already seen a reduction in the amount of time it takes to re-enroll youth. We are proud to announce that we have just begun a pilot program with the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) in which we now have access to the NYCDOE student information network.

VII. Initiatives Underway

OCFS continually reassesses the effectiveness of our service delivery model to identify areas in which improvements can be made. We have a number of important youth and family initiatives underway and have made significant progress in reducing lengths of stay for youth in both our limited secure and non-secure facilities. In 2003, the median length of stay in limited secure facilities was 13.9 months. By the end of 2005, the median length of stay was further reduced to 10.8 months. In non-secure facilities, the median length of stay was reduced from 12 months in 2003 to 7.3 months at the end of 2005. This has been accomplished through a number of initiatives. I will speak briefly about a few of them.

A. Service System and Case Management Redesign

Placement of Youth Closer-To-Home/Regionalization: OCFS has begun systematically placing youth closer to home to support earlier, intensive family involvement during the youth’s placement and community partnerships in preparing for the youth’s reentry to the community. It allows for a single case manager to oversee the youth’s placement, supports efforts to reduce lengths of stay in OCFS facilities, and reduces transportation costs. Approximately 75% of youth in OCFS facilities are now placed closer to home, compared with only 40% ten years ago.

Case Management Redesign: The family assessment process is being strengthened with an intensified focus on family engagement. Engagement of families in this process is critical. OCFS encourages family participation in treatment team meetings, facility visits, and home visits by OCFS staff, and telephone and written communication. OCFS is making video conferencing technology available statewide in both the residential facilities and the Community Services field offices to allow parent participation in the treatment plans for their child, and visitation via video conferencing when the family is unable to travel to the facility. OCFS developed a Global Information Center available to the case managers via the OCFS Intranet to assist in identifying and accessing the required services for the youth prior to community re-entry.

OCFS community service case managers interface with local departments of social services (LDSS), including the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), where

prior or current child welfare involvement with the family has been identified. OCFS provides notification to LDSS and ACS of placement of youth from local districts, as well as 30-day notice when the child is to be discharged. The communication provides the foundation for collaboration and case planning.

Strengthening Aftercare Services: OCFS continues to reshape our aftercare services so that youth experience a structured and supportive period of aftercare as they make the transition back to their homes and communities. This includes the development of a comprehensive and individualized prescriptive treatment plan for each youth, earlier planning with providers in the community to which the youth will be returning, and the provision of evidence-based, proven interventions and services to youth.

Evidence-based Community Initiatives (EbCI): OCFS has been able to use EbCI to divert some youth from entering OCFS residential facilities and, more frequently, to support the youths' return to family and community after residential placement with OCFS. The United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention recognizes these programs, when used as alternatives to placement, as being effective in reducing delinquency and mental health conditions. OCFS contracts with several agencies to provide these therapeutic services to youth in care and their families in the community. OCFS is undertaking an initiative to better engage the courts in encouraging the use of EbCI more frequently as an alternative to placement in an OCFS facility, where appropriate.

Seneca County Model: OCFS is collaborating with Seneca County, including the Department of Social Services and the Youth Advocacy Program, Inc., to reduce lengths of stay in OCFS residential placement and in private voluntary agencies. The collaboration also strengthens local support for community wraparound services, resources for the family, and a coordinated case review and management system in support of community re-entry.

Bronx Initiative: OCFS is partnering with the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to support case management and service planning for youth in OCFS custody who are in placement with private voluntaries. A special project has been instituted in the OCFS Bronx Community Multi-Services Office that will allow for co-location of OCFS and ACS staff to work jointly in reducing lengths of stay through intensified aftercare planning and services.

B. Safety and Security in OCFS Facilities

The safety and security of residents and staff in OCFS facilities is of paramount importance. OCFS has developed standards for physical plant safety and security at each of our facilities. A five-year safety and security Capital Plan was created, funded and is being implemented. Starting in February 2006, we began to systematically install and upgrade state-of-the-art video camera, alarm, and key locking systems. This ambitious upgrade continues and will greatly enhance the safety and security of staff and residents at each of our facilities. Video camera systems have been installed in 16 of our 31 facilities to assist in monitoring the safety of youth and staff.

As you may be aware, OCFS recently experienced a tragic fatality in one of our residential facilities. We are deeply saddened by this occurrence and are fully committed to the prevention of any further incidents of this nature. While the cause of this young person's death has not been established, there are multiple investigations being conducted by the following agencies: New York State Police, Office of the Inspector General, Medical Examiner's Office, OCFS Special Investigations Unit, and Child Protective Services (Institutional Abuse Bureau). OCFS is cooperating fully with each of these investigations.

Reducing the Use of Physical Restraints: OCFS is working to reduce the frequency of the use of physical restraints of youth in OCFS facilities through several initiatives. The agency restraint policy (Use of Physical Force, PPM 3247.13) is currently being revised to include debriefing each incident where physical force was warranted. Under the new policy, OCFS has reduced the circumstances under which physical restraint is allowable. OCFS has a zero tolerance for staff misconduct; all allegations are investigated and thoroughly reviewed. There are several investigative bodies that can become involved in this process, including the facility, Labor Relations, Special Investigations Unit, Child Protective Services, and law enforcement.

OCFS is working to change the juvenile justice system's culture and counseling philosophy to more fully embrace strength-based strategies and increase awareness of the trauma most OCFS residents experience prior to their placements in our programs, and the effects of the trauma on youth. We have begun a project to train all staff members in trauma reduction to help them better understand techniques to de-escalate situations and reduce the need for restraints. All case managers have been trained in Advanced Counseling skills, and childcare staff are currently being trained in Intervention skills, which include strength-based principles and other strategies for de-escalating youth. OCFS has collaborated with OMH to develop and implement the "Risking Connections" trauma curriculum in our residential facilities. This curriculum provides education on trauma and effective strategies for childcare staff.

Sanctuary Model: In our efforts to change the culture and to focus on developing trauma-informed care, OCFS is piloting the implementation of the Sanctuary Model in a few of our residential facilities. The Sanctuary Model represents a trauma-informed method for changing an organizational culture in order to address the psychological and social trauma experienced by the majority of youth entering our system. Two smaller OCFS facilities began the process of implementing the Sanctuary Model several months ago. Implementation in additional facilities is underway. To our knowledge, no other state in the country has implemented this model, or a similar model, in its juvenile justice facilities. While learning from another state's experiences would be helpful, OCFS is prepared to move forward with this pilot in several facilities, recognizing the enormity of this undertaking. We believe the model supports our efforts to create safe, secure, and therapeutic environments in our residential facilities. Our plan is to implement the Sanctuary Model in 2-5 of our facilities over the course of three years.

VII. Conclusion

OCFS continually strives to strengthen services to youth in our care, and we are proud of the services we provide. We recognize that there is always room for improvement and look for assistance from our partners, including the Legislature, to realize these improvements. A fundamental prerequisite for a quality system is a full complement of trained staff. We ask your assistance in this regard. In particular, it is difficult for OCFS to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, certified in the subjects they teach, especially math and science. Salaries for OCFS teachers are not competitive with the public school systems.

It is critical that youth leaving our care are re-enrolled immediately in the public school systems and receive academic credit for the course work completed while in OCFS care. This re-enrollment is too often problematic, especially in New York City and especially for students with special education needs. OCFS continues to work with departments of education and individual school districts to facilitate this process, but the challenge is great.

It is clear that the need for mental health services for the youth in our care has outpaced available resources. During a one-week period in March 2006, 98% of youth residing in one large OCFS facility were found to have a mental health diagnosis, 65% were diagnosed with multiple disorders, and approximately 28% were prescribed psychiatric medications. The mental health needs of youth in OCFS custody are pervasive and serious; we ask for your support in bringing additional resources to address these needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

