

Agency Snapshot

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

By Allen R. Grossman

The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) was carved out of the former HRS in 1994. In 1997 and 2000 significant changes were made in statute and DJJ now finds its duties and responsibilities set forth in chapters 984 and 985, F.S. The legislative changes have created a shift away from the social services model and toward a punitive criminal justice approach while maintaining the juvenile justice system in a manner that continues to be operationally and philosophically distinct from the adult criminal justice system. DJJ and its staff are responsible for handling juvenile delinquency cases and addressing the issues of children and families in need of services. As a result of the 2000 "Tough Love" plan implemented by the Florida Legislature, DJJ shifted away from HRS service district structure to a structure that conformed to the boundaries of the 20 judicial circuits. DJJ is organized in five program offices: Administrative Services, Prevention and Victim Services, Detention Services, Probation and Community Intervention, and Residential Services. The Department operates 25 juvenile detention centers in 24 counties with a total of 2,007 beds. The detention centers provide custody, supervision, education and mental health/substance abuse services to juveniles statewide. Juvenile Detention Officers receive specialized training and certification. Approximately 13,000 youth are committed to the Department by the local judiciary and placed in mandatory day treatment or residential commitment programs.

Head of the Agency:

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The Clerk's Office does accept electronic and facsimile filing during operating hours.

Public Records Requests:

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The General Counsel, Brian Berkowitz, is a graduate of the University of Florida (B.A. '77) and the Florida State University College of Law (J.D. '82). Previously in his legal career, Brian served first as Staff Counsel for various Committees and then as General Counsel for the Florida House of Representatives. From 1993-1995, he also served as the Director of the Task Force for the Review of the Criminal Justice and Corrections Systems established within the Office of the Attorney General of Florida. In 1999, Brian came to the DJJ General Counsel's Office and was earlier this year appointed as General Counsel to the Department.

Number of Lawyers on Staff:

16 attorneys located in Tallahassee and four regional offices.

Kinds of Cases:

Attorneys representing DJJ routinely find themselves participating in Circuit Court in matters as diverse as civil rights cases, tort claims, contract disputes, the prosecution of cases involving Children In Need of Services (CINS) and Families In Need of Services (FINS) and of course at the request of any concerned Circuit Judge in custodial and other matters related to juvenile defendants in their courts. In addition, approximately 20% of the work performed by the General Counsel's Office deals with APA matters including bid disputes, rulemaking and rule challenges, and administrative challenges to reconciliations as to County Cost Share determinations. In fact, one attorney within the General Counsel's Office is assigned full-time to handle the rulemaking process for DJJ.

Practice Tips:

Exhibiting common professional courtesies will go a long way in facilitating resolutions when working with the General Counsel's Office and it is always best to remember that the ultimate goal of the Department of Juvenile Justice is to increase public safety by reducing juvenile delinquency through effective prevention, intervention, and treatment services that strengthen families and turn around the lives of troubled youth. Tailoring your request to meet these goals and keeping in mind the realities of statutory and fiscal limitations on the authority of DJJ is also always a good idea.