



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Contact: DJJ Communications Office  
(850) 717-2710  
[news@djj.state.fl.us](mailto:news@djj.state.fl.us)

## **Setting the Record Straight: Miami Herald Omits Facts, Ignores Reforms in Series Targeting DJJ**

Today, the Miami Herald published a series of stories about the juvenile justice system in Florida that blatantly neglects to recognize DJJ's years of aggressive, innovative reform efforts and nationally recognized success serving Florida's youth and communities.

Secretary Christina K. Daly said, "The stories published by the Miami Herald today do not accurately define the juvenile justice system in Florida or the many partners who are committed to serving youth and their families. Florida's juvenile justice system is made up of stakeholders, service providers, and most importantly, individuals who care deeply about children and their success. Our agency works each day to continuously improve, and over the past six years, we have implemented aggressive, innovative reforms to build a better system for the thousands of youth who need the guidance our staff and services provide.

"DJJ has not, does not and will not ever tolerate or condone mistreatment of children in our care. Staff who are not well intentioned to help transform the lives of our children have no place within this agency. Anyone who is found to have encouraged, enticed, or ordered youth to engage in fights or assault other youth is, and will be, held accountable to the full extent of the law, including criminal prosecution. We consistently work to identify, investigate and hold fully accountable any staff member who does not meet our high standards – both within DJJ facilities and with our contracted providers.

"Florida is proud to be recognized as a national leader for juvenile justice and to ensure the Department can continue to support high-quality officer recruitment and retention, Governor Rick Scott recently announced a proposed 10 percent pay increase for juvenile detention and probation officers. DJJ will continue to tirelessly work to provide safe and effective services for the youth and families that rely on our agency."

First and foremost, the Miami Herald fails to recognize that the transformation of our juvenile justice system in recent years is producing results:

- Florida has the lowest juvenile arrest rate in more than 40 years.
- DJJ has reduced the use of residential commitment for low-moderate risk youth by 60 percent.

- DJJ has the lowest recidivism for youth on probation that the agency has ever seen.

While DJJ worked for two years in a collaborative and transparent relationship with the Miami Herald on these stories, much of the information provided by the agency was left out, mischaracterized or dismissed without reason.

#### DJJ THOROUGHLY INVESTIGATES ANY ALLEGATIONS AGAINST STAFF

**Regardless of whether in state-run detention facilities or privately contracted residential commitment programs, any allegation made regarding the care and safety of youth is thoroughly investigated by the Department to ensure youth are safe and staff are meeting our high standards of care.**

Following the death of Elorde Revolte, the Department along with the Public Corruption Unit of the Miami Dade State Attorney's Office completed extensive investigations into the allegations against staff. Neither of these investigations proved these allegations to be true.

**Anyone who is found to have encouraged, enticed, or ordered youth to engage in fights or assault other youth is, and will be, held accountable to the full extent of the law, including criminal prosecution.** It is false and misleading to insinuate that the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice does not take the safety of our youth seriously.

DJJ has never, and will never, tolerate the outsourcing of discipline by staff to youth. It is the expectation that all staff, contracted or otherwise, treat youth with the respect and dignity they deserve. The Department also reports all allegations of abuse and neglect to the Florida Abuse Hotline to be investigated by the Florida Department of Children and Families, and in many cases, law enforcement also investigates incidents of abuse and neglect in detention facilities and residential commitment programs. **All staff in both juvenile detention facilities and residential commitment programs have unrestricted access for reporting incidents, without supervisor approval, to the Florida Abuse Hotline and the DJJ Central Communications Center.**

DJJ evaluates and replaces cameras on an on-going basis as we rely on the critical information provided by security cameras when investigating incidents at our centers and ensuring the safety of the youth placed in our custody.

In addition to the safeguards provided by incident reporting, security cameras and exhaustive investigations, the Department employs a comprehensive oversight and monitoring process. Youth and staff interviews are conducted as a part of the oversight process as well as review of video, incident reporting and trends related to the use of physical intervention.

For more information, click [HERE](#). (pages 1, 2, 3, and 4)

#### DJJ MAINTAINS HIGH STANDARDS FOR HIRING PRACTICES

DJJ takes seriously our obligation to maintain the confidence and trust of the public and ensure we are hiring the most qualified and best-suited applicants to work with Florida's youth and families. All direct care staff are required to undergo and pass a level 2 criminal history record check, which outlines the more than 50 disqualifying offenses, in addition to drug screening and a comprehensive interview and reference check process in accordance to Florida law.

**The Department also requires our contracted providers to ensure their staff are meeting our high standards, and we have worked collaboratively with them to improve hiring practices through a statewide initiative.**

Recently, the Department further strengthened our reference check process for individuals with prior state employment experience to ensure a comprehensive and thorough review of a prospective employee's previous performance and employment as well as ensure staff meet the high expectations of this Department. This is just one of the many reforms implemented over the past six years as we continue to identify new ways to improve our agency.

Additionally, Governor Rick Scott recently announced that he will propose a 10 percent pay raise for juvenile detention and juvenile probation officers in his 2018-2019 recommended budget to support high-quality officer recruitment and retention to further improve the life changing work in the juvenile justice system.

For more information, click [HERE](#). (page 5)

#### DJJ LEADS THE NATION IN INNOVATIVE REFORMS

Florida embraced a more rehabilitative approach beginning more than six years ago when DJJ embarked on aggressive reform efforts. A major portion of these reforms have been focused on early interventions and prevention as well as community-based interventions, which provide the best outcomes for our youth.

**It is entirely inaccurate to say that Florida is falling behind other states in rehabilitative juvenile justice reform. In fact, just last month, Florida was recognized by PEW Charitable Trusts for being a national leader in evidence-based programing that has helped to identify and enact programs that lower recidivism rates.**

DJJ has the lowest recidivism for youth on probation that the agency has ever seen and the agency is fully committed to further building on reform efforts to continue reducing juvenile delinquency, increasing public safety, and providing the services at-risk youth and their families need to transition youth back into their communities and guide them towards successful adulthood.

For more information, click [HERE](#). (page 6)