

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**Representative Kathy Hogan, Chair**  
**January 6, 2016**

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**North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation**  
**Division of Juvenile Services**

**Lisa Bjergaard, Director**  
**Presented Testimony Concerning Behavioral Health Needs**

For the record, I am Lisa Bjergaard, Director of the Division of Juvenile Services.

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I was asked to speak to you today regarding the behavioral health challenges of adolescents and to make recommendations. I want to thank the committee for providing me with this opportunity to talk about adolescent behavioral health, and to express my appreciation for your continued interest and concentration on this issue.

The data profile illustrates for you the prevalence of several key risk and needs indicators for the youth corrections population. The youth profile within the deep end of the juvenile justice system began to shift from a more delinquent, antisocial youth to those with more serious mental health and complex trauma needs 5-7 years ago. The shift was marked enough by the end of 2010 to cause me to begin to report our data differently to the legislature in January of 2011, which is when the profile document was first created. Many of the critical risk and need categories have continued to grow as percentage of the population since that time, as illustrated on the Juvenile Corrections Assessment Data page.

As you can see, youth committed to corrections are an increasingly challenging group to serve. The complex and often interrelated issues require intensive and sometimes lengthy interventions in order to prepare them to successfully return to their homes, schools and communities.

In order to curb this trend, we must turn our attention to prevention and early intervention. Therefore, I would like to shift us from the discussion about challenges, to my thoughts on recommendations.

As many of you may be aware, North Dakota has a Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group. The Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group (SAG) is appointed by the Governor pursuant to the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act. The JJDP Act is the single most important piece of federal legislation affecting youth in juvenile justice systems across the country.

The role of the SAG is to monitor compliance with the JJDP Act and create momentum for juvenile justice reform. The SAG's work takes into account the latest research on adolescent development and the hallmarks of a developmental approach which include:

- Accountability without criminalization
- Alternatives to juvenile justice system involvement
- An individualized response based on assessment of needs and risks
- Confinement only when necessary for public safety
- A genuine commitment to fairness
- Sensitivity to disparate treatment
- Family engagement

The SAG develops North Dakota's Three-Year Juvenile Justice Plan, which is submitted to the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention pursuant to the JJDP Act and focuses on priority issues based on a thorough data analysis. The most current Three-Year Plan can be viewed at the link below:

[http://www.ndaco.org/image/cache/ND\\_FY2015-17\\_Plan\\_All.pdf](http://www.ndaco.org/image/cache/ND_FY2015-17_Plan_All.pdf)

The Plan identifies three priority issues for reform. In order to address these priorities using the developmental approach, we must identify youth early, assess them accurately, and provide robust diversionary options whenever possible. Policies and strategies should keep at risk youth connected to their homes, schools and communities.

# Division of Juvenile Services

March 2015

## Profile of Juvenile Corrections Youth

89% have issues with  
**mental health**

- 75% of youth have a serious emotional disorder
- 56% of the youth that have a mental health issue require a medication managed by psychiatry

74% have issues with  
**substance abuse**

- 65% used alcohol before age 15
- 67% have family w/criminality or substance abuse
- 50% used marijuana on a weekly basis

71% have  
**family instability**

- 60% have a family that struggles economically
- 51% have had multiple caretakers
- 50% witnessed parental conflict and/or violence

66% have  
**academic problems**

- 60% have failed 3 or more classes
- 43% have usual grades that are a "D" or "F"
- 36% have had to repeat a grade

99% have  
**criminogenic risk factors**

- 91% are impulsive and take risks
- 87% have opportunity for criminal activities
- 89% have been rebellious over past two years
- 85% associate w/criminal friends or other delinquents

91% have issues with  
**cognitive reasoning**

- 82% appear manipulative and dominate others
- 79% easily lie and get away with it
- 66% blame others or situation
- 63% demonstrate a lack of remorse or guilt

80% lack adequate  
**social skills**

- 59% exhibit negative social perceptions
- 45% do not engage in pro-social activities
- 30% are isolated and lacking social support

*"Juvenile Justice is the wisest investment in crime prevention we can make."*

# Juvenile Corrections Assessment Data

