



As a pediatrician and President of the Northeast Florida Pediatric Society (NEFPS), I speak on behalf of the commitment of our NEFPS members as we have dedicated our lives to advance the health and well-being of all children in Jacksonville. This is particularly so for children with special needs, such as those involved in the juvenile justice system. The Covid-19 pandemic highlights inequities that have long existed in our communities. The week's Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Covid-19 report brought this concern to the forefront, as dozens of youth in regional DJJ facilities have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Youth who are infected, others who may be required to quarantine, and staff are all affected in this scenario.

Covid-19 amplifies this urgency to address the quality of physical health, mental health, and other youth services in the continuum of the Juvenile Justice system. From a medical perspective, it imperative that experts in pediatrics and public health be engaged in ensuring evidence-based policies and protocols are implemented to protect the health and well-being of detained youth, DJJ staff, and the community at large. Toward these ends:

- The Department should implement a rigorous evidence-based testing program to monitor the prevalence of disease among youth and staff in its facilities. The results of testing should be transparent and data released to the community on an ongoing basis.
- In response to testing, appropriate and non-punitive quarantine and other procedures should be implemented. If facilities are not able to implement appropriate procedures, measures should be taken to ensure the safety of all involved in the systems, including facility closures.
- In order to prevent the spread of disease and resulting morbidity and mortality:
 - Juvenile offenders who can be released safely should be released if they pose no immediate and substantial risk to the community.
 - Detention for technical probation violations should be suspended.
 - Youth at high risk of COVID-19 complications (those with chronic illnesses including asthma, diabetes, obesity, etc.) should be released or placed in appropriate safe environments.
 - JSO notices to appear in person for nonviolent offenses should be suspended.
 - Appropriate PPE precautions for both youth and staff should be implemented and rigorously enforced.
 - Youth with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be evaluated promptly and released to an appropriate medical facility until it is determined that her/his disease progression allows for a safe return the referring facility.
 - Youth for whom the purposes of detention have been fulfilled, and/or for whom rehabilitation services cannot be provided due to current circumstances, should be released if they do not pose a community threat. This includes youth in residential placement.
 - Requirements to attend and/or pay for court and Probation-ordered programs, community service and labor, etc. should be suspended.
- Due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, a moratorium on the assessment and collection of all fines and fees in the juvenile legal system should be enacted.

As the number of Covid-19 positive youth and staff continue to increase rapidly, it is critical that actions be taken to mitigate the direct and indirect impact of Covid-19 infections on individuals, and limit the public health risks this poses to our community. To this end, I respectfully ask that a task force be expediently organized with pediatricians' voices at the table as we assess the current housing and health situations that our juvenile offenders experience.

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