



Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice

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NEWS RELEASE

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Jetson Center for Youth's Residents Re-located to Other OJJ Secure Facilities Last Night

Baton Rouge, LA -- All youth housed at Jetson Center for Youth, in Baker near Baton Rouge, have been relocated to the Office of Juvenile Justice's (OJJ) other secure care facilities. The transfer took place in the early hours of this morning, and all 76 youth who were residents at Jetson are now at Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe or Bridge City Center for Youth near New Orleans.

The transfer took place under tight security to ensure public safety. Parents of residents are being notified of the transfer and location of their sons.

"The reasons for the transfer of youth are actually very simple – we have determined that the environment at Jetson was not conducive to delivery of the therapeutic model while ensuring safety of youth and staff," said OJJ Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary L. Livers.

"In the past few years, we have worked to implement a therapeutic model in Louisiana," Dr. Livers continued. "This transfer will help us continue that process so we can provide treatment to these youth."

"At this point we would need to evaluate whether to modernize the existing buildings or replace the facility with a smaller, new facility," Dr. Livers said.

"This is a proactive move that we believe fits into our larger plan for the future; the current Jetson facility does not fit into our reform efforts," said Dr. Livers. "We will now move forward with evaluating the needs in this region and planning for a facility that will better meet our mission and provide youth with a quality treatment environment."

The existing facility was designed in the 1940s as a correctional style institution for juveniles. Dormitory configurations do not allow for appropriate supervision of youth by staff. Jetson comprises several hundred acres of property, but only a very small area has been in use. Movement of youth and staff has been hard to control and monitor due to the large size of the property and location of buildings.

"We feel that we have better options," Dr. Livers added. "Since 2009, our secure care population has decreased 26 percent. We have opened Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia, and we are about to break ground for the Acadiana Center for Youth in Bunkie. We have available space at our other existing facilities to house the 76 youth from Jetson. Swanson in Monroe has 8 housing units and we have opened 3 additional dorms there. Bridge City has 10 dormitories to accommodate the Jetson youth. In addition, we increased the number of youth in most existing dorms by two – from 12 to 14."

“By transferring youth away from an obsolete and costly physical plant and placing them at facilities more suitable for effective implementation of the therapeutic model, we will better ensure the safety of youth and staff,” Dr. Livers said.

“There are 154 employees at Jetson. The majority will be offered the opportunity to transfer to work in other OJJ facilities,” said Dr. Livers. “Over the next few days, we will be meeting with the Jetson employees. We value the hard work of each OJJ employee.”

Jetson has existed for 65 years in its current location on Old Scenic Highway, at U.S. Highway 61, since 1948, under several different names. In 1900, the president of the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association noted the need for a correctional institute for delinquent and neglected “colored” youth. The idea did not gain traction until the 1920s, when civic groups began pressing for such a school. The 1928 Legislature created the institution, but failed to appropriate funds. Dr. J.S. Clark, president of Southern University, who had been instrumental in the legislature’s action, persuaded the legislature to establish a school that would be free from penal influence, in which humanitarian methods would be used to prepare boys to live as decent and productive citizens. Finally, the 1948 Legislature created the State Industrial School for Colored Youth, and it was opened on October 1 of that year, with one student, 11 staff and an operating budget of about \$150,000.

The school became co-educational in 1956, and it was desegregated in 1969. The name was changed to Louisiana Training Institute – East Baton Rouge, or LTI. It was also known simply as Scotlandville, after the nearby community. In 1995 the facility was renamed the Louis Jetson Correctional Center for Youth, after a noted humanitarian and social activist. In 2005, the word "correctional" was deleted and the facility was called Jetson Center for Youth.

The 2008 Legislature passed legislation that changed the name of our agency from the Office of Youth Development (OYD) to the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), and mandated closure of Jetson by June 2009. As Jetson was downsized in anticipation of closure, a therapeutic model was implemented for the smaller number of youth, with the goal of transforming the facility from a correctional style youth prison into a modern, therapeutic model. Legislation in 2009 allowed OJJ to permanently downsize Jetson, retain the name, and transform a portion of the property into a smaller, regional facility.

“We anticipate that some advocates and parents of youth who were transferred further away from their families may be concerned that the distance hinders the therapeutic model’s emphasis on family involvement,” Dr. Livers said. “We will go the extra mile and make an extra effort to ensure that family engagement continues to be a part of the treatment process for our youth. We realize that transportation and scheduling for visitation may be an issue for some families, and we will accommodate special visit requests if needed. In addition, if transportation to the facilities is an issue, our Probation and Parole staff will assist in transporting families for visits.”

“We feel that safety of youth and staff is our paramount concern, and OJJ is committed to doing whatever is best to maintain an orderly routine that is conducive to safety. A therapeutic community setting cannot be achieved unless the youth and staff feel that they are in a safe environment,” Dr. Livers added.

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