



## **Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice**

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### **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **OJJ Staff Recognition comes as Agency Receives Commendation from the LA Senate**

Baton Rouge, LA – On the eve of a week set aside to honor public servants, the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) received a public commendation from the Louisiana Senate. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 56, read into the Senate record last week, commended and acknowledged a series of reform accomplishments by OJJ.

Sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Sharon Weston Broome, the resolution noted a significant number of achievements and national honors racked up by OJJ during the past year. The resolution appears below, including the noted accomplishments.

“OJJ staff in every secure care facility, regional probation and parole office statewide and the central office in Baton Rouge, are dedicated and hardworking men and women who strive daily to provide outstanding service to the youth in our care and custody, as well as to provide for the public safety of Louisiana’s citizens,” said OJJ Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary L. Livers. “Our staff is most deserving of commendation by the state Senate, and I am personally very pleased that it came at a time when our agency is about to recognize our staff during an important commemorative week.”

The first week in May is National Corrections Officers Week, recognized by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the National Institute of Corrections to honor the work of correctional officers and correctional personnel nationwide and to recognize the contributions made by the men and women who work in jails, prisons, and community corrections across the country.

“We salute those who quietly go about their business in the corrections profession on a daily basis. We thank all of ACA’s chapters and affiliate organizations, leaders of our industry and citizens who showed their support for correctional employees who work every day to keep the public safe and do so without much thanks along the way,” said ACA Executive Director James A. Gondles, Jr.

“We should show our appreciation throughout the year to those who work in the most challenging of environments. Correctional officers, sheriffs’ deputies, correctional managers, supervisors, wardens, jail administrators and health care professionals interact with some of the most dangerous, and sometimes unstable citizens in our society. Each day, they put themselves at risk to work with a population that the general public often does not really want to know anything about,” Gondles continued. “Unfortunately, correctional employees receive little or no appreciation for doing their job. Offenders need teachers,

chaplains, counselors, health care providers and mentors. Correctional employees meet these needs, and correctional agencies across this country do so with limited staff, limited funding, and little or no reward or commendation.”

“Our profession offers some of the most capable, committed, patient and persistent employees in the nation. They serve those in custody who, at the least, have acted irresponsibly, while others may have committed very heinous crimes. Correctional employees understand it is not their job to simply secure the facility and the people in it. They provide direction and hope, and prepare offenders for a new life,” Gondles said.

May 5–11 is also Public Service Recognition Week, set aside every year since 1985 by the U.S. Congress to recognize the contributions of public employees and the services they provide, and to promote the spirit of public service. As part of the nationwide celebration of Public Service Recognition Week, Gov. Bobby Jindal has proclaimed Wednesday, May 8, 2013, as State Employee Recognition Day in Louisiana.

“There is no greater career than public service, and no greater responsibility than working in a public agency,” Dr. Livers said. “We serve to fulfill a mission that does not bring an excess of earthly riches, but allows us to do good things, bringing us more intangible riches, those that transcend time and material gain. I am so proud of the OJJ staff for their stellar accomplishments. Our agency serves a difficult population, often under very challenging circumstances.”

OJJ is a cabinet-level agency that provides services to youth adjudicated delinquent and placed in state custody. The agency provides community-based services to low level youthful offenders and to youth on probation and parole. OJJ also provides services for youth and their families ruled in need of services by courts of juvenile jurisdiction.

OJJ has 11 regional field services offices staffed by Probation and Parole officers and social workers in Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, Natchitoches, New Orleans/Jefferson, Opelousas, Shreveport, Tallulah and Thibodaux. OJJ operates three secure facilities for males: Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe, Jetson Center for Youth in Baker, near Baton Rouge, and Bridge City Center for Youth near New Orleans. Secure care for girls is provided at Ware Youth Center near Coushatta, Red River Parish. A satellite facility, Swanson Center for Youth at Columbia, will open later this month.

#### **Full Text of SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 56**

Commends and publicly acknowledges a series of reform accomplishments of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Youth Services, Office of Juvenile Justice.

WHEREAS, the Justice Policy Institute and the Annie E. Casey Foundation issued reports showing that Louisiana reduced its rate of youth incarceration by over 50 percent over a 13 year period, from 1997 to 2010; and

WHEREAS, both the Justice Policy Institute and the Annie E. Casey Foundation stated this reduction was one of the most dramatic improvements in the United States, and Louisiana is being called a national model in reducing the number of youths in out-of-home placement; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) recently transitioned to a regionalized model of leadership and, under this new agency model, divided the state into three regions, each with a director responsible for youths at all levels of custody and supervision; and

WHEREAS, this new organization of the agency creates a more cohesive team unit and allows for more efficient and effective delivery of services; and

WHEREAS, OJJ schools celebrated the high school graduation of 54 youths in June of 2012, including 34 graduates from the Swanson Center for Youth's Southside Alternative High School, nine graduates from the

Bridge City Center for Youth, and 11 graduates from the Scenic Alternative High School at Jetson Center, as well as the awarding of GEDs to an additional 57 youths while in an OJJ secure care facility in 2012; and

WHEREAS, OJJ secure care facilities have introduced two new vocational programs, including Bridge City Center for Youth's auto mechanic program, which saw 20 youths receiving certifications from its Convergent Technology vocational program, and Bridge City Center for Youth's culinary arts program, which saw 19 students receive their ServSafe certificate, a nationally accredited food safety certification from the National Restaurant Association; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Department of Education measures the progress of all Louisiana schools, including schools inside OJJ secure care facilities, and has designated the schools at both Swanson Center for Youth and Bridge City Center for Youth as a "*Top Gains School*," meaning a school within the top-third of all 440 Louisiana schools, in light of both schools improving their performance by doubling their projected growth target; and

WHEREAS, the American Correctional Association (ACA) re-accredited OJJ's central office in the summer of 2012 after OJJ's central office passed 100 percent of the ACA accreditation standards; and

WHEREAS, Bridge City Center for Youth received a formal recommendation for accreditation by the ACA, which, once achieved, will mean that all OJJ offices and facilities will be ACA accredited; and

WHEREAS, Harvard University recently recognized OJJ for its innovative programming for youth, specifically praising OJJ's Service Coordination Model, a government initiative through the "Bright Ideas" program, an initiative of the broader Innovations in American Government Awards program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; and

WHEREAS, OJJ partnered with the Northshore Community and Technical College and the MacArthur Foundation to establish a model whereby community and technical colleges work with youth involved with the juvenile justice system, creating an individual career pathway for participating youth through career guidance, intensive case management and follow-up, education, job skills training, pre-employment services, as well as job placement services upon completion of their chosen academic program.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend and publicly acknowledge the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Youth Services, Office of Juvenile Justice, for the foregoing series of accomplishments.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Youth Services, Office of Juvenile Justice.

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