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Rauner Administration Moves to Improve Outcomes for Dually-Involved Youth

Pay for Success initiative aims to reduce stays in institutional care, prevent repeat criminal behavior

CHICAGO – Governor Bruce Rauner and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Director George Sheldon today announced the next step to improving outcomes for youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems through a first-of-its-kind pay for success initiative.

"Many youth in the juvenile justice system have endured a breakdown in their families," said Governor Rauner. "This project is an innovative demonstration of how we can, collaboratively, improve services for some of our state's most vulnerable residents, and it continues our administration's efforts to transform health and human services delivery in Illinois."

The State of Illinois Pay for Success (PFS) initiative is a pilot project aimed at measurably improving the lives of youth who are dually-involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems by driving resources towards better, more effective programs. In partnership with Conscience Community Network, LLC (CCN), a network of six Illinois nonprofit service providers, the initiative will provide intensive case coordination and timely access to evidence-based treatments to 807 youth from 18 counties throughout the state over four years.

CCN members include Maryville Academy, OMNI Youth Services, One Hope United, SGA Youth and Family Services, UCAN, and Youth Outreach Services.

"Residential facilities are a therapeutic intervention for a specific limited time, not a placement," said Director Sheldon. "In fact, at some point, extended stays in these facilities actually are worse for most youths. These young people need a home and family environment, with a stable, loving adult presence."

Once assigned to the initiative, a trained facilitator will coordinate a team of professionals from the child welfare and justice systems, along with family members and the youth, to thoroughly assess the youth's strengths and needs and develop a plan to best support the youth. Some of these supports may be evidence-based treatments, family therapy, psychotherapy, academic support, pro-social activities, substance abuse treatment, and career and employment support. The facilitator will also assist in identifying a permanent home for the youth to avoid residential institutionalization, the type of facility most of these youth currently end up residing in over long periods of time.

"The Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department considers Pay for Success to be a very promising approach to addressing some of the most challenging situations involving children and young people involved with our community-based corrections work," said Avik Das, Acting Director and Chief Probation Officer for Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services. "We remain quite optimistic that the program as designed has great potential to drive innovative, effective interventions and supports that would stabilize and ultimately connect this vulnerable population to safe, caring, community settings, while at the same time minimizing their exposure to more formal institutional environments."

The University of Michigan's School of Social Work will perform a rigorous evaluation of the outcomes of the initiative, focusing on the extent to which the program produces a reduction in the number of days youth are placed in residential facilities, a reduction in the number of days youth are incarcerated and improved child well-being. The evaluations will determine the amount of the reimbursement to the providers. Like other DCFS pilot programs focused on reducing stays in residential facilities, the Pay for Success program, if proven successful, may later be expanded across the State.

"Pay for Success allows government to pay only when individual lives are improved, rather than for the number of participants in a program," said David Wilkinson, Director of the White House Office of Social Innovation. "Impact investors often cover the upfront costs of service delivery, taking on the risk a project does not hit targets and protecting taxpayers. We're glad the federal Social Innovation Fund provided key grant funding in support of leaders in Illinois and their vision to help build brighter futures for these young people."

"The Illinois Pay for Success project has the potential to significantly improve the lives of high-risk youth because the State and service providers have come together to fundamentally redesign the systems through which youth are connected to services," said Professor Jeffrey Liebman, Director of the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab, which provided pro-bono technical assistance to the State on this project.

"The partner agencies of the Conscience Community Network have witnessed firsthand the poor outcomes experienced by dually-involved youth across Illinois," said CCN Board Chairman Rick Velasquez. "These youth are caught between systems and often miss opportunities to build strong and healthy lives. This innovative approach can improve the well-being of these youth whether they are from the urban, suburban or rural areas of Illinois, while ensuring taxpayers are getting the value and results which they seek from government. This partnership between the private sector and government marks a smart and effective way to transform business as usual in human service delivery across the state of Illinois."

"Youth simultaneously involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as those helping them, face challenges that can seem insurmountable," said Caroline Whistler, Co-Founder and President of Third Sector Capital Partners. "Third Sector is honored to partner with the Conscience Community Network in this pioneering collaboration with DCFS. By advancing rigorous, outcomes-based contracting in Illinois, this Pay for Success initiative will drive efforts to measurably improve the lives of vulnerable youth throughout the state." The pilot is one of numerous initiatives by DCFS under a mutually agreed implementation of a federal court consent decree in a case known as B.H. v. Sheldon. This is the first time that a Pay for Success financing program has been used by the State of Illinois.

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