

# The History of Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice



**Christina K. Daly, Interim Secretary**

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## **Our Mission**

To increase public safety by reducing juvenile delinquency through effective prevention, intervention, and treatment services that strengthen families and turn around the lives of troubled youth.

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## **Our Goals**

- Prevent more youth from entering or becoming further involved with the Juvenile Justice System
  - Divert more youth from involvement with the juvenile justice system
  - Provide optimal services
  - Ensure appropriate youth placement and utilization of Residential beds and redesign existing resources
  - Improve communication and collaboration
  - Enhance workforce effectiveness
  - Strengthen practices and processes
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## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN FLORIDA**

### ***Foundation of the Department***

Florida has traditionally treated young people who run afoul of the law under a “rehabilitative” model of justice. This can be traced back to the time when all “proceedings relating to children” were under the jurisdiction of the former Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). That agency’s approach to dependency and delinquency cases was the same: provide social services to the child and the family. Under Chapter 39 of Florida Statutes, HRS managed many different types of actions involving children, ranging from dependency actions in child abuse cases to delinquency proceedings for juveniles charged with criminal acts.

The first of Florida’s gradual efforts to shift the state’s juvenile justice system away from a social services model occurred in 1994 when the Legislature created the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), which absorbed the powers, funding and personnel of the HRS Division of Youth Services. DJJ was assigned responsibility for juvenile delinquency cases and children and families in need of services (CINS/FINS) cases. Juvenile justice provisions in Chapter 39, F.S. remained virtually unchanged and most of the new agency’s employees were former employees of HRS. Hence, philosophically, DJJ continued to consider juveniles as children in need of treatment and reform rather than criminals deserving punishment.

DJJ further distanced itself from its HRS origins in 1997. Although few changes were made to substantive law, two new chapters in the Florida Statutes were created by transferring juvenile justice provisions from Chapter 39, F.S., to the newly created Chapters 984 and 985. Chapter 984, F.S., was created to address CINS/FINS and Chapter 985, F.S., was created to address juvenile delinquency cases.

### ***The Tough Love Era***

In 2000, comprehensive legislation known as “Tough Love” authorized DJJ to overhaul its philosophical and programmatic approach. This legislation signified the most dramatic policy shift away from the social services model and toward a punitive criminal justice approach. However, even under “Tough Love,” the juvenile justice system continued to be operationally and philosophically distinct from the adult criminal justice system. Florida continues to segregate juveniles from their adult counterparts, although circumstances were expanded under which a juvenile could be prosecuted as an adult. Youth continued to be managed under a strategy of redirection and rehabilitation rather than punishment. Although the state strengthened its hold on juvenile delinquents under “Tough Love,” the system maintained its focus on treatment designed to affect positive behavioral change.

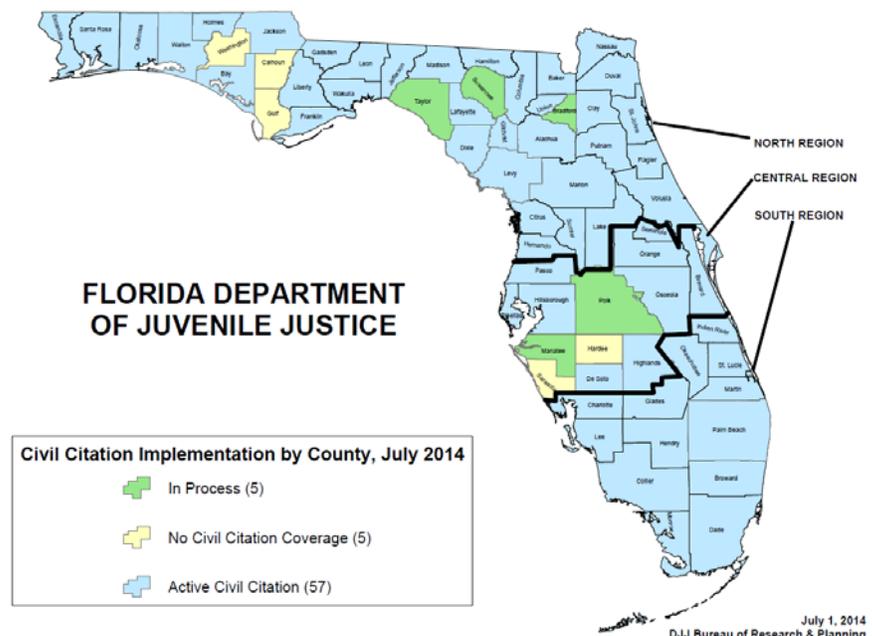
As a result of “Tough Love,” DJJ shifted away from the HRS service district structure to one that conformed to the boundaries of the 20 judicial circuits. In addition, DJJ was charged under chapter 985.02(3), F.S., with the statewide development and coordination of comprehensive services and programs for the prevention, early intervention, control, and rehabilitative treatment of delinquent behavior. Accordingly, DJJ was, and currently is, organized in five program offices: Administrative Services, Prevention and Victim Services, Detention Services, Probation and Community Intervention, and Residential Services.

### ***The Blueprint Commission***

In July 2007, the Blueprint Commission was created and tasked with developing recommendations to improve Florida’s juvenile justice system. The findings and recommendations of the Blueprint Commission, with input from juvenile justice stakeholders and the public, guided DJJ’s development of a strategic plan to make the changes needed to fulfill its mission. DJJ’s Strategic Plan builds on the foundation of the Blueprint Commission’s report, “Getting Smart about Juvenile Justice in Florida.” In preparing its Strategic Plan, DJJ initiated a process of continuous strategic thinking and planning that would produce not just one strategic plan, but a sequence of plans to keep pace with the changing needs and priorities of juvenile justice in Florida.

### ***Developing a National Model for Juvenile Justice***

Beginning in 2011 with Governor Rick Scott’s appointment of Secretary Wansley Walters, the department engaged in a comprehensive and strategic evaluation of its entire juvenile justice system to establish a national model of system excellence. The careful examination of its practices and services, as well as incorporation of the latest research and data, yielded goals of meeting needs of youth, families, and communities by preventing and diverting more youth from entering the juvenile justice system; providing appropriate, less restrictive, community-based sanctions and services; reserving serious sanctions for youth who pose the greatest risk to public safety: and focusing on rehabilitation. Each of these elements is critical to ensuring public safety and caring for its youth by providing the right combination of services and sanctions to most appropriately meet the needs and mitigate the risks for each youth and family.



One important component of Secretary Walters' reform initiative was promotion of statewide use of Civil Citation to divert first-time, non-serious youth from an arrest record that can follow them for years, interfering with educational, work, and military opportunities. Through the ambitious efforts of many stakeholders, the number of counties offering Civil Citation grew to 57 by July of 2014, with five additional counties in the process of developing programs. The recidivism rate for this alternative is just 5%, making it one of the state's most successful program models.

### ***The Roadmap to System Excellence***

In late 2012, DJJ released the Roadmap to System Excellence (Roadmap). This document serves as DJJ's plan for reform initiatives and the rationale for them. To create a comprehensive strategy, DJJ's Executive Leadership Team examined agency practices, services and results; exhaustive analyses, studies, and input by internal and external stakeholders and consultants; recommendations from Governor Scott's Juvenile Justice Transition Team; DJJ's Strategic Plan; and the report of the Blueprint Commission. The result is a roadmap to guide understanding of DJJ's efforts to:

- Reduce juvenile delinquency;
- Redirect youth away from the juvenile justice system;
- Provide appropriate, less restrictive sanctions;
- Provide optimal services and care;
- Reserve serious sanctions for those youth deemed the highest risk to public safety; and
- Focus on the rehabilitation of at-risk and delinquent youth.

### ***DJJ Today***

In the updated 2014-2015 Roadmap, achievements from the original Roadmap are reported and goals and objectives are reflected as accomplished, modified or added. The emphasis this year is on expanding newly-implemented initiatives and sustaining change. DJJ continues to fortify a system of excellence, a national model for juvenile justice, through strategic decisions supported by data, research-based practices, and measurable outcomes that result in improved results and savings to the state. Enhancements will follow a cycle of continuous improvement as DJJ manages its population and resources to provide the right services, in the right place, at the right time and in the right way to best meet the needs of at-risk and delinquent youth.