



POSITION STATEMENT

Adopted by NPJS Board of Directors ~ October 21, 2013

MINIMUM DIRECT CARE STAFF RATIO IN JUVENILE DETENTION AND CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Juveniles require adequate adult guidance and direction to ensure their healthy development. The typical population of juveniles held in detention or correctional facilities requires greater support and supervision than non-confined juveniles. It is important to supervise the juvenile's actions, statements, and developing relationships through meaningful interaction with staff.

To be effective, supervision of juveniles requires a sufficient number of trained and competent staff members, in a sufficient staff-to-juvenile ratio. Confined juveniles are sometimes being housed in facilities that are overcrowded and understaffed.

NATURE OF THE ISSUE

Juvenile detention and correctional facilities face constant pressure to reduce budgets. As staffing accounts for 70 to 90% of the total fiscal operations, many administrators are pressured to reduce staff or house additional juveniles to achieve a lower per diem rate.

- Some juvenile facilities utilize modern design and technology features as an intended substitute for appropriate levels of direct care staffing and associated costs.
- In times of population crisis and regardless of design, all facilities may experience periods when they have insufficient staff-to-juvenile ratios due to exigent circumstances.
- An adequate number of direct care staff is necessary to monitor the behavior of juveniles and to engage them in helpful programs and services without reliance on segregation of misbehaving juveniles.
- Juvenile detention centers generally do not control their admissions or releases and their staff-to-juvenile ratios can increase quickly. Therefore, those facilities must have a system for enhancing the direct care staff-to-juvenile ratio accordingly.
- Unique juvenile facility populations, such as those with mental health diagnoses, sex offenders or others requiring specialized services, may require a larger staff-to-youth ratio to safely and effectively be served.
- The OJJDP *Conditions of Confinement: Juvenile Detention and Corrections Facilities Research Report* states, "One important element of security is staffing levels. Without sufficient staff, juveniles are more likely to be able to harm each other, staff, or themselves. In addition, lack of staff causes low staff morale and higher levels of stress for staff." When the staff to juvenile ratio exceeds national standards, programming effectiveness will diminish, which increases the likelihood of physical intervention occurring.

DEFINITION

Direct Care Staff ~ Employees whose exclusive responsibility is the direct and continuous supervision of juveniles. Direct care staff must be in the same room, trained and responsible to ensure a safe environment for juveniles.

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The National Partnership for Juvenile Services advocates that regulation, policy, procedure and practice ensure a minimum ratio of one direct care staff to no more than eight (1:8) juveniles during waking hours, and a ratio of one direct care staff member to no more than sixteen (1:16) juveniles during sleeping hours, with a minimum of two direct care staff on duty at all times regardless of population. At least one direct care staff of the same gender as residents served shall be on duty at all times. Further, if the design of a facility limits direct care staff members' direct interaction with residents or if a facility's population has specialized characteristics or needs, that facility should increase the number of direct care staff beyond minimum recommended ratios. Monitoring technology may be used as a supervisory enhancement but shall not be a substitute for direct supervision of youth.