



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2024

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

FROM: YON LAMBERT, DEPUTY CITY MANAGER

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Release of Funds from FY 2024 Contingent Reserves for Operation of the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center.

ISSUE: Should City Council release funding from FY 2024 Contingent Reserves for the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center (NVJDC)?

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council allocate \$657,629 to the NVJDC per the responses below that demonstrate progress towards:

1. Optimizing capacity within Northern Virginia for Juvenile Secure Detention services
2. Leveraging available physical plant capacity for alternative uses; and
3. Pursuing new regional partnerships for use of facilities and staffing.

BACKGROUND: In its FY 2024 budget deliberations, the City Council placed a portion (\$657,629) of the City's appropriation for the NVJDC into Contingent Reserves pending progress updates from staff to three Council questions. The purpose of this memo is to respond to Council and provide an update on Center operations.

NVJDC, which opened in 1956 at 200 South Whiting Street in Alexandria, is one of 24 juvenile detention centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It is a secure facility that serves juvenile offenders (ages 11 to 18), placed primarily by the Juvenile & Domestic Relations Courts of Alexandria, Arlington County and the City of Falls Church, who have committed a wide range of offenses from parole and probation violations to misdemeanor and felony offenses. NVJDC is designed to accommodate 70 youth but, due to decreased utilization prior to 2020, has been staffed since 2017 at a level to handle no more than 46 juveniles at any one

time. The NVJDC site also includes Sheltercare, which was established in 1988 as a short-term group home to provide safe, structured support for culturally diverse at-risk adolescents.

The Center is managed by a five-member Commission (two from Alexandria, two from Arlington and one from Falls Church) each appointed by their respective governing bodies. The Commission provides policy guidance and direction to the Center's staff, including an Executive Director. Alexandria, Arlington and Falls Church fund the NVJDC pursuant to an interjurisdictional agreement, with each jurisdiction's contribution calculated annually proportionate to each jurisdiction's average use of the facility for the previous three fiscal years, measured in client days ("Use Ratio"). The Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) also provides funding for Center operations.

A City-initiated 2020 study (Attachment 1, "Cost Benefit Analysis of the Use of Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center and Alternatives") evaluated two options for juvenile detention in Northern Virginia: (1) close and enter into a regional agreement with another jurisdiction or (2) continue operation of the NVJDC with cost efficiencies. During the study, Fairfax County determined it was not interested in further regionalization of juvenile detention. Prince William and Loudoun Counties were eliminated from consideration for infrastructure and capacity reasons. Therefore, the 2020 study concluded that keeping the Center open with cost efficiencies in place was, on balance, the recommended service model for juvenile detention in Alexandria, Arlington and Falls Church.

Recently, utilization at the Center has increased. For example, in FY 2023, NVJDC documented a 98.94% increase in utilization from the primary jurisdictions since FY 2020 (to 8,875 total client days from 4,461 total client days in 2020). The average daily population year-to-date in 2023 was 25.61 residents; in December 2023 the average daily population was 29.55. Beginning in 2019 and through 2022, NVJDC staffing was reduced to 62 from 82 to align with lower population numbers experienced at the time. The Center has placed more emphasis on positive behavior management programming (with less reliance on room confinement) since adopting a trauma-informed care model and approach in 2017.

DISCUSSION: The responses below are intended to address the items raised by the Council.

Q: How is NVJDC demonstrating progress toward optimizing capacity within Northern Virginia for Juvenile Secure Detention services?

A: As noted earlier, the average daily population at the Center is increasing. Utilization has increased 98.94% since 2020 and 173.84% since 2022, as outlined in the chart on Attachment 2. Whereas the average daily population in FY 2022 was 12 youth, the recent daily population of the Center has remained consistently in the range of 30 or higher (e.g., the total population at the Center on January 29, 2024, including outside placements, was 45). This increase is driven by increased usage of detention from Alexandria (2,992 more days utilized in FY 2023 than in FY 2022, per Attachment 2) and Arlington (2,598 more days utilized in FY 2023 than in FY 2022, per Attachment 2) and by the Center leveraging its ability to accommodate, for a fee, additional youth from outside Northern Virginia, when placed by DJJ.

While the Center is still generally not operating at what is considered "capacity" (i.e., up to 46 occupants), staff report that occupants' needs have changed to require more care, particularly for substance abuse issues. In the past fiscal year, roughly 50 percent of the youth arriving at NVJDC are experiencing un-medicated substance use withdrawal - most typically due to fentanyl. Staff report this is a physical and emotional process that requires 24-hour, one-on-one care (one staff assigned to monitor one resident, often for several days at a time until the resident is well enough to be supervised in the general population). As a result, staff hours and shifts

are adjusted to ensure continuous monitoring. Staff are not professionally trained in the best practice of detoxification, nor are they able to provide medication-assisted treatment to youth who would benefit from the treatment. Staff have adjusted daily practices to address basic safety, care, and comfort needs.

Amid the increase in population, Center staff have continually investigated opportunities to increase utilization. Some of these options have included: (a) accepting youth from other Northern Virginia jurisdictions or Washington, D.C., (b) a partnership with the Department of Juvenile Justice to treat youth from jurisdictions outside of the Northern Virginia region and (c) contracting with the federal government. All the listed options are revenue generating and fully cover costs. However, staff acknowledge a need to closely coordinate with the Board and partner jurisdictions.

Q: How is NVJDC demonstrating progress toward leveraging physical plant capacity for alternative uses?

A: The design of the Center - which includes the adjacent Sheltercare operation as well as a unit that allows for direct access - creates an opportunity to explore a multi-functioning space. However, the 2020 cost benefit analysis notes the facility needs significant capital improvements because of its age. With future investment, the Center could provide both residential and non-residential services to youth in the community, such as outpatient treatment. Some possible alternative uses, each of which requires additional investment, include:

Repurposing Unit 7: Unused since 2021, the Center's Unit 7 is physically like other pods, containing 10 beds, communal spaces, and private rooms that may be used for counseling or other treatment purposes. However, Unit 7 does not have the high level of security as the occupied units; it can be accessed from the parking lot without entering through the secured gates. This space has been the focal point of potential alternative uses, including offering this as a resource hub for families on the West End and seeking a revenue-generating partnership with a local non-profit.

Intensive Outpatient Program: At its December meeting, the Commission recommended that NVJDC use funding from its capital reserves to pilot a one-year Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) to address substance use disorder. This program could use Unit 7 as its treatment space. It is not yet clear if the program would require additional operating costs from the jurisdictions, or whether the Commission supports a long-term IOP.

Alternative or additional space for Sheltercare: During the pandemic, Sheltercare operations moved to Unit 7, and it was staffed as a separate quarantine space for youth, pending placement. A long-term option that would require significant capital investment could be to fully relocate Sheltercare to Unit 7. This would allow for the City-owned Sheltercare building to be utilized differently such as a Youth & Family Resource Center.

Q: How are staff demonstrating progress toward pursuing new regional partnerships for use of facilities and staffing?

A: City staff, including the City Manager, have renewed discussions with our regional partners to discuss potential new models for juvenile detention in Northern Virginia. Additionally, the General Assembly in FY 2024 directed the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, in collaboration with the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to evaluate *and submit to the General Assembly no later than October 15, 2024, a report on juvenile detention center cost savings strategies. The report will also include cooperation and assistance from the Department of Planning and Budget, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Virginia Municipal League. Staff expect this initiative will also consider additional utilization options.*

As City and NVJDC staff continue to work closely to optimize capacity, the partnership will include the following next steps:

1. **Governance:** Coordination with the Board and partner jurisdictions to deliver first-rate services to youth while best considering jurisdictional needs. This will include revisiting the existing Interjurisdictional Agreement, consideration of new auditing provisions and staffing models that best align with the jurisdictional and Board needs.
2. **Cost Efficiencies:** Continued consideration of efficiencies as outlined in the 2020 cost benefit analysis.
3. **Collaboration with the Commonwealth:** Continued close coordination with state government staff in preparation for recommendations expected in October 2024 report.

FISCAL IMPACT: The total share of Alexandria's FY 2024 budget for NVJDC is \$1,588,968. Because the City has not released all its FY 2024 funds due to a portion remaining in contingent reserves, Alexandria has submitted two payments each of \$232,834.75 for the first and second quarters, leaving a balance of \$1,123,298.50.

Total income for the first and second quarters was \$1,194,828.72. Total expenses for the first and second quarters were \$1,276,786.33, leaving an operating deficit of \$81,957.61. The Center's largest expense has been salaries.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Cost Benefit Analysis of the Use of Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center and Alternatives
2. NVJDC Days Utilized By Jurisdiction
3. Presentation

STAFF:

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