



**OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT JUVENILE OMBUDSPERSON**  
Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice

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February 6, 2024

To the Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor of the State of Illinois

To the Honorable Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor of the State of Illinois

To the Honorable Members of the Illinois General Assembly

Dear Governor, Lt. Governor and Members of the General Assembly,

I am pleased to present the FY2023 Annual Report from the Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson (OIJO) for the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) pursuant to 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-35. The OIJO functions independently within the Department of Juvenile Justice for the purpose of securing the rights of youth committed to its care. This report summarizes the activities of the OIJO, highlight areas that need to be addressed, provides my Office's recommendations to address them, and contains data about issues department-wide and by individual facility for State Fiscal Year 2023.

The OIJO is grateful for the support of the Lieutenant Governor's Office and Governor's Office, as well as the access granted to us by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice to continue to identify issues within the Department, make recommendations to address those issues and collaborate towards the shared goals of serving our young people. I look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders to support these youth and address any and all issues impeding the Department from successfully fulfilling its mission.

Thank you for the continued honor of serving in this capacity.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karima Douglas".

Karima Douglas

Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson

## Introduction | De Minimis

When reflecting on this past year several competing thoughts come to mind. We are encouraged to see the decrease of COVID cases both in and out of the DJJ facilities statewide. We are encouraged to see most young people under aftercare supervision begin and complete their term in communities without ever returning to custody. We are encouraged to see the building blocks of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Illinois Plan for Transformation take shape with community services and family engagement as key priorities. We are encouraged to see DJJ forge stronger bonds with community-based organizations to provide critical restorative justice and mentorship programs. We are encouraged to see DJJ leadership trust and support more young people to step out of locked facilities to use their commitment time to intern, work, enroll in school, go on field trips, volunteer and build real world, life skills. These are the kinds of investments that put progressive reform into action.

Reflecting on this past year also brings to mind the term “de minimis.” Oxford defines de minimis as an adjective meaning “too trivial or minor to merit consideration.” Alongside all the encouraging progress of this past year, this Office can’t shake the thoughts of the chronic, year after year after year complaints from youth and necessarily this Office, that while reduced significantly aren’t zero. There can’t be so much praise for progress that we allow for any number of complaints to be considered “de minimis,” trivial, or insignificant. With reduced numbers, comes a brighter spotlight on the few young people who may have the most complicated backgrounds, the highest needs and who demand the most support. What may seem trivial to some means everything to a young person with the most limited power and privilege.

This is the annual report submitted by the OIJO to the Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor of the State of Illinois and the Illinois General Assembly summarizing the activities done in furtherance of the purpose of the Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson (OIJO) pursuant to 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-35. This report covers state fiscal year 2023 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023) the period hereafter known as FY2023.

This document contains aggregated and disaggregated data organized by individual facility. It also describes for consideration by the General Assembly and the Governor the work of the Ombudsperson, issues and complaints undertaken by the Ombudsperson without confidential identifying information concerning the subjects of the reports or investigation, and recommendations that the Ombudsperson has relating to systemic issues in the Department of Juvenile Justice’s provision of services and other matters.

## Office Background

The Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson was created by statute in 2014. This Office was created as a parallel entity with the Department of Juvenile Justice for the purpose of securing the rights of youth committed to the Department.<sup>1</sup> On February 23, 2023, the Illinois Senate confirmed the appointment nomination from Governor Pritzker of Karima Douglas to the Office of Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson. Her appointment began on September 27, 2021, with a term ending on February 1, 2025. The Ombudsperson reports directly to the Governor and “may only be removed by the Governor for incompetency, malfeasance, neglect of duty, or conviction of a felony.”<sup>2</sup> Cases of severe abuse or injury of a youth, serious misconduct by staff, as well as other special circumstances identified by the Ombudsperson must immediately be reported to the Governor and Director of IDJJ.<sup>3</sup> The Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson provides an Annual Report summarizing the activities and findings of the Office to the General Assembly and the Governor.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-5

<sup>2</sup> 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-15

<sup>3</sup> 730 LCS 5/3-2.7-25 (c)

<sup>4</sup> 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-35

## **Duties of the Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson**

- Review and monitor the implementation of rules and standards established by the Department of Juvenile Justice.
- Evaluate the delivery of services to youth.
- Provide assistance to a youth or family who are determined to be in need of assistance.
- Investigate and attempt to resolve complaints when a youth or family is in need of assistance or a systemic issue regarding the provision of services is raised.
- Review and periodically inspect the facilities and procedures of any facility in which a youth is placed.
- Be accessible to and meet confidentially and regularly with youth to inform them about pertinent laws, rules and policies, and their rights.
- Report certain types of serious concerns immediately to the Director of DJJ and the Governor.<sup>5</sup>
- Refer alleged criminal behavior and violations of the State Officials and Employee Ethics Act to the Illinois State Police, and the Executive Inspector General respectively.
- The Ombudsperson is a mandated reporter and reports allegations of abuse and/or neglect to the Department of Children and Family Services Hotline.
- Promote awareness of the Ombudsperson's Office among the public and youth.
- Develop and make available a complaint process for youth and anyone complaining on behalf of a youth.
- Notify the guardian ad litem and attorney, parent or guardian of a critical incident involving a youth and provide a copy of the critical incident report upon request.

## **Rights of the Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson**

- Review court files of youth.
- Recommend policies, rules, and legislation designed to protect youth.
- Make appropriate referrals.
- Attend internal administrative and disciplinary hearings and advocate for the best interest of youth when necessary.
- Contact or consult with an administrator, employee, youth, parent or expert.
- Have confidential and privileged communication initiated by youth in person, by phone, by mail or any other means at any time.
- Have full and unannounced access to youth and Department facilities at any time.
- Have appropriate meeting space in the facility that preserves confidentiality.
- Participate in professional development and appropriate professional training.
- Receive copies of critical incident reports.

The OIJO has no authority to compel DJJ staff or administrators to change a decision or alter a policy or practice. Rather, the Ombudsperson brings to the attention of DJJ leadership issues involving the rights of committed youth, fairness in the access and application of services, policies and practices and other matters that warrant the Office's involvement.

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<sup>5</sup> 730 ILCS 5/3-2.7-25(c)(1) – (5)

## Summary of Activities<sup>6</sup>

### Facility Visits

There is no way to do the work of this Office without in-person contacts and facility visits. Over the course of FY2023, the Ombudsperson and Restorative Justice and Community Outreach Manager visited with youth at each of the Illinois Youth Centers and on aftercare. We logged thousands of miles making over **100** visits to Illinois Youth Centers. Visits often include one-on-one conversations between the OIJO staff and young people on their living units or in small office settings. These visits serve as opportunities for the Ombudsperson to introduce the Office staff, Office roles and responsibilities to new youth shortly after they are admitted to IDJJ. Visits also provide opportunities for OIJO staff to privately learn about and follow-up on issues, inquiries and complaints initiated by phone call or via voicemail. An in-person visit allows for more in-depth conversation between youth, Ombudsperson, facility staff and administrators. During these visits OIJO staff build safe relationships with youth face to face, open the lines of communication for more sensitive issues youth may not be comfortable discussing by phone or in writing, and allows OIJO staff to observe, in real time, the youth's living, working and learning conditions.

In addition to the core visits to DJJ Illinois Youth Centers, FY2023 and the addition of the RJCOM allowed for the necessary work of visiting and learning about the needs of youth returning to community. The RJCOM conducted site visits of **eight** of the top residential treatment facilities hosting our youth population: Indian Oaks Academy, Onarga Academy, Maryville Academy, Riveredge Hospital, One Hope United, Rosecrance and Arrowhead Youth and Family Services. These sites accept and work with DJJ youth occasionally on authorized absences as an extension of DJJ custody but most often as residential host sites for youth under aftercare supervision who need housing support, are under the guardianship of DCFS or require specialized in-patient treatment. Outside of those residential facilities, the RJCOM visited and met virtually with youth in county juvenile detention centers, adult county jails and in youth's communities with the collaboration of DJJ's aftercare team. With more than half of DJJ's population under aftercare supervision and a Plan for Transformation centered on community services, the OIJO is directing staff resources to meet youth where they are.

### Calls

One of the most critical ways we build and maintain relationships with the youth we serve is by staying in touch by phone. Over the course of FY2023, the OIJO recorded a total of **1210** calls from youth in IDJJ facilities as well as youth out in communities on aftercare. Youth in DJJ custody and on aftercare, their family members and others calling on their behalf could reach the OIJO by telephone seven days a week. All calls from Illinois Youth Centers remain free, unmonitored, and unrecorded to maintain the confidentiality of the Office. Youth have access to Securus operated phones in common areas of each of their living units. The reasons for youth calls vary widely and we encourage youth to call for any reason they feel the need to. Youth may call to initiate complaints, to ask questions about navigating DJJ, to confirm answers they have received from DJJ staff, to vent about bad days or to share good news. For the purposes of this report and to limit duplicate statistics, our Office

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<sup>6</sup> Please see Appendices A, B and C for more details on the OIJO visits, phone calls and complaints in FY2023.

records the number of issues based on our formal and informal inquiries and complaints to the Department rather than how often the issues are discussed with youth by phone or in person.

### **OIJO Outside**

The Ombudsperson's Office cannot operate within a vacuum. Our mandate is to respond not only to youth committed to the Department but also to connect with youth's families and to perform outreach to communities where these young people are expected to return and thrive. In FY2023, the OIJO maintained strong relationships with community-based organizations who work both in and outside the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems like Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, New Life Centers and Lawndale Christian Legal Center- Chicago-based restorative justice hubs and pillars in the community. We continued to work alongside juvenile justice stakeholders and advocacy groups like the John Howard Association, Illinois Justice Project, Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, Juvenile Justice Initiative, Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law's Children and Family Justice Center and the ACLU of Illinois. The Office built new relationships through outreach to groups like Youth Advocate Programs who provide invaluable mentorship to young people while in custody and upon their return home.

In March 2023, our Restorative Justice and Community Outreach Manager (RJCOM) participated in a peace circle keeper training at Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago's Back of the Yards community. This is the same training the Ombudsperson and dozens of DJJ staff and administrators participated in over the last several years. In May 2023, the Ombudsperson attended IDJJ's ICEMA luncheon where security and non-security staff who live out the positive values and mission of the agency were celebrated.

The Ombudsperson and RJCOM presented to three IDJJ Intern Academy classes in November 2022, February and May 2023. The presentations allowed us two opportunities: first, to describe the Office, its role and responsibilities and second, to build relationships with the newest recruits to the Department and discuss what should be our shared commitment to serving the youth to the best of our abilities. The OIJO also arranged for IDOC personnel to meet with young people convicted of adult felonies who were in DJJ custody at IYC Warrenville and IYC St. Charles but could transition to IDOC custody in the coming years. These presentations allowed young people to speak candidly with IDOC administrators who could directly answer their questions about expectations of IDOC.

The OIJO promoted the Office in classrooms at the Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law, University of Illinois Chicago School of Law and at special DJJ programs like graduation ceremonies, cultural events and youth performances.

### **Monitoring and Referrals**

Most of the routine, day to day work of the Office revolves around monitoring and referrals. Monitoring included our routine observations and tracking of how DJJ and its affiliates implements its policies. This year, the staff of the OIJO routinely participated in "adjustment committee" disciplinary hearings as well remained a permanent fixture in DCFS/DJJ biweekly dually involved youth meetings. We observed responses to major behavior incidents in real time, met with administrative teams at each of the IYCs and rode along with aftercare specialists to visit with youth and tour day reporting centers. Monitoring also looked like our Office regularly requesting and tracking internal youth grievances, critical incident reports, monthly logs of new criminal complaints against youth, internal and external investigations, state's attorney's objections to youth releases, and legislative changes that directly impact youth commitments.

Referrals included the routine communications between the OIJO team and DJJ administrators and executive team members. These communications are most often by email and are the primary way we inform DJJ personnel of youth questions, complaints, and concerns in the hopes of resolving those issues expediently and in the best interest of the youth. Our primary responsibility is to amplify the voices of young people and these direct referrals allow us to draw attention to specific, individual youth concerns in a way that may get lost in daily operations or may not have been packaged in the best way to be heard otherwise. In FY2023, we made at least **500** referrals of youth issues to IYC administrators.

## **Complaints**

Complaints are the formal written memos from the Ombudsperson's Office to the IDJJ Director and Executive Staff regarding serious issues that were ongoing and could not be resolved through informal referrals, presented a systemic problem and/or a complainant requested that a written complaint be filed. In FY2023, the OIJO filed **11** complaints on behalf of IDJJ youth. Most of the issues reported to the Ombudsperson are addressed informally by referral to Illinois Youth Center administrators or DJJ Executive Staff. Formal complaints were typically investigated by the Office and discussed with DJJ leadership before they issued a written response. When deemed necessary, complaints can be forwarded to and investigated by external entities.<sup>7</sup> This year complaints spanned several critical issues including: lack of appropriate treatment for serious mental health needs, staff harassment, fair compensation for committed youth, egregious facility response following major disturbance and lockdown, inappropriate property confiscation, etc.

## **Issues Spotlight by Facility**

### **IYC Harrisburg**

The most common referrals arising out of IYC Harrisburg this year were:

- Peer safety and conflict concerns
- Allegations of inappropriate staff conduct
- Lack of access to services; especially regular haircuts
- Unit and facility transfer requests and delays associated with those requests

Regarding peer safety and conflict, most of our outreach to DJJ administrators presented as requests for living unit transfers or alternative options for school attendance because youth wanted to avoid fights or assaults from other youth in school. These routine referrals showed not just a pattern of teenagers unable to get along for various reasons but also a lack of trust from youth that staff would adequately intervene when conflict arose. Lack of access to services like haircuts at IYC Harrisburg remains a pervasive issue. This year our Office was able to help coordinate youth who have the requisite education and experience to travel from other facilities to provide those services. This was a win-win for youth to earn fair wages while they fine tune their skills and help DJJ in providing services in the short term while they secure long term, reliable contract vendors.

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<sup>7</sup> Eg. Office of the Executive Inspector General, Illinois State Police, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Office of the Governor and Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Allegations of inappropriate staff conduct is the most consistent complaint from youth at IYC Harrisburg and this facility had the highest population and produced the most phone calls and referrals. Inappropriate staff conduct includes not just physical and verbal violence from staff but also, neglect- youth not feeling like staff respond to their needs fairly and in a timely manner. Youth repeatedly complain that staff misuse and overuse room isolation with pretextual justifications like temporary breaks after line movements, breaks for administrative tasks and behavior holds. While room isolation and “time outs” should be rarely used as a last resort or for short term de-escalation, youth at IYC Harrisburg detail its chronic overuse. Youth also complain that staff misuse DJJs internal PBIS point system. Our Office routinely referred complaints to administrators to provide additional independent review of youth’s point cards.

### **IYC St. Charles**

The most common referrals arising out of IYC St. Charles this year were:

- Inappropriate property confiscation and storage
- Extreme and harmful operational response after major behavioral disturbances
- Inconsistency re: programs and education
- Peer safety and conflict concerns
- Mail delays

Several young people reached out to complain about their property being seized without proper justification or necessary record keeping. When this happened, staff were slow to respond to account for the items taken, to justify labeling certain items as contraband or to return items determined to be seized in error. This issue was particularly egregious when tied with major behavioral incidents. In addition to informal outreach about these concerns, this Office filed a formal complaint when after a major behavioral incident where several group fights emerged simultaneously, IYC St. Charles staff and administrators confiscated all the property of several youth, moved them to new living units for hours without any property. Some youth went weeks without documentation of the searches and what was taken. Some youth never had all their property recovered as those items were broadly declared as contraband and either mislaid or destroyed. Youth in these situations are given little recourse and when they reacted poorly to losing some of the few items they had in their possession, they were further punished for their negative reaction.

Youth also reached out about peer conflicts and inconsistency regarding programming which led to unit and facility transfer requests as they searched for better options. This year, school district #428 adjusted their policy and practice regarding GED education and testing to necessarily focus on middle and high school education services. While this change was justified, it left many youths frustrated who were pursuing their GED as an alternative to the high school diploma path.

### **IYC Chicago**

The most repeated issues from IYC Chicago were about the physical plant. Youth complained about extreme swings in temperature depending on their unit and fluctuations in weather. They also often asked for repairs and improved maintenance of phones, drywall, and plumbing. Youth, especially on one unit, “C wing” complained of ice-cold showers year-round. Youth also complained about limitations on their phone use. They would point out inconsistencies in the time allowed for their calls or the Securus system abruptly ending their calls despite being charged for more. Finally, the Office often referred complaints about inconsistencies in policy implementation especially between facilities with IYC Chicago seemingly being more restrictive when it came to phone calls and personal property.

### **IYC Pere Marquette**

IYC Pere Marquette continues to produce the fewest referrals and this year was no exception. This facility also had the smallest youth population averaging between 10 and 12 youth. Youth found it difficult to be accepted to and in DJJ's only "minimum security" facility. When there were major violent incidents involving staff and youth this year, youth involved were summarily isolated for extended periods and transferred out of the facility with little procedural due process or consideration of mitigating or provoking factors. With relatively few complaints and so many youths eager to be placed in a beautiful environment with fewer youth and fewer opportunities for self-sabotage, some youth limited their outreach to our Office for fear of being singled out for negative attention.

### **IYC Warrenville**

There were also relatively few issues referred from IYC Warrenville. The common issues were peer conflict which spilled over into requests for unit transfers and restrictions at school and other programs. Youth complained about some physical plant issues like problem plumbing and regular cleanliness and maintenance. One other common theme was complaints about extended periods of room confinement and overreliance on movement restrictions as disciplinary/punitive tools.

### **Recommendations**

Many of the FY2023 issues spotlighted above from all DJJ's youth centers represent chronic issues this Office presents annually. Below are our renewed recommendations for systemic improvements:

- In the event of critical incidents where lockdown may be appropriate, it should be narrowly applied and consistent with PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports). Youth who acted appropriately should be rewarded in order to incentivize future positive choices.
- Youth and staff who are directly involved in similar critical incidents should be brought together to sit in restorative peace circles facilitated by trained peacemaking circle keepers where they can openly discuss what happened, explain their perspective, take responsibility for their part in the harm that was done, and reach consensus about what everyone needs to feel safe in the future.
- This Office wants DJJ to follow, in good faith, its policy on the usage of behavioral holds. The relevant policy reads in part: "It shall be the policy of the Department to utilize de-escalation techniques and minimize the use of confinement. Staff should make every reasonable effort to avoid confinement when possible and first attempt less restrictive techniques." The policy allows for staff to place youth on a behavioral hold for "engaging in dangerous behavior that poses a serious and immediate threat to his or her own safety, the safety of others, or the security of the youth center."
- Staff members with a history of staff assault allegations should be retrained and if training fails, they should be assessed for their suitability for working with troubled teens.
- Install high quality video and audio equipment and eliminate blind spots in all Illinois Youth Centers for the protection of both staff and youth.
- Require that staff use camcorders or body worn cameras to videotape and audio record interactions between youth and staff that occur in youths' rooms and walks between installed camera blind spots.



- Assign staff members with a history of misconduct allegations and/or staff assaults charges to positions and areas where they have little to no contact with youth.
- Contract with a community based mental health provider(s) experienced in addressing the needs of traumatized and mentally ill African American youth. The provider should both treat youth and train mental health and other staff in the best practices of trauma informed care.
- Provide training and expert coaching for all employees of DJJ in order to create a trauma informed agency that practices trauma informed care in every facet of staff member interactions with youth and one another.
- Provide training and expert coaching for all employees in order to create a multi-culturally competent agency.
- Draft and implement policies and practices that require and support trauma informed care and cultural competence, including provisions for ongoing training.
- Create a specialized treatment team or contract with a community provider to serve youth with the most challenging behavior. The unit or provider should employ a multicultural, multi-systemic treatment team experienced in assessing, treating and succeeding with this population of youth, so that African American, “urban” and other marginalized youth receive treatment consistent with their lived experiences.
- Restrict staff that work on the special treatment units to those with substantial training in dealing with mentally ill youth.
- Regularly review movement logs to ensure that youth are receiving adequate hours of education, recreation and mental health services.
- Formally limit the use of transfer to the Illinois Department of Corrections as a consequence or threat of punishment for negative behavior. Those threats, that only apply to a relatively arbitrary group of young people committed to DJJ, foment a culture of fear and manipulation rather than treatment and rehabilitation.

### **Restorative Justice**

Over the course of FY 2023, the Ombudsperson and Restorative Justice & Community Outreach Manager (RJCOM) Torey Cohen-Boseman worked to center more restorative justice practice and philosophy in DJJ. As Torey learned that the IYCs Chicago, St. Charles and Warrenville partnered with community-based organizations to provide restorative justice programming he began attending these restorative justice programs once a week at each facility. The programs were led by Urban Life Skills at all three facilities, Lawndale Christian Legal Center at IYC Warrenville, and Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation at IYC St. Charles.

In March of 2023 Torey completed a week-long peace circle training course that further increased his overall knowledge of restorative justice and certified him as a peace circle keeper. He worked to bring the skills and values from this training into mediations during IYC visits as well as presentations to graduate students and DJJ staff interns.

OIJO met with DJJ leadership advocating for the increase of restorative justice philosophy and practice to permeate the Department on all levels. Discussions included increasing training opportunities for staff re: restorative justice, encouraging staff to participate in weekly community-led peace circles, incorporating more restorative justice practices within the disciplinary process, and expanding restorative justice programming beyond the northern facilities. In June of 2023, the RJCOM began connected IDJJ to organizations throughout the state and in Missouri to meet this need. Organizations located in St. Louis and Chicago were connected to IDJJ to provide restorative justice practices to IL Youth Center Pere Marquette and IL Youth Center Harrisburg. Other organizations located in Chicago were contacted regarding an increase in the number of restorative justice programming offered at IL Youth Center Warrenville, IL Youth Center St. Charles, and IL Youth Center Chicago.

While OIJO staff personally know the transformative potential restorative justice brings to any community and any system, DJJ youth and staff echo the same sentiments. Youth at IYC Warrenville expressed that peace circles were therapeutic, helped resolve issues amongst each other and staff, and provided a space for their voice to be heard. Youth at IYC St. Charles expressed that peace circles helped them learn ways to resolve incidents in the facility and issues in society from a restorative perspective. The youth also felt that the restorative justice practice provided a safe space for their voices to be heard. Youth at IYC Chicago shared that sitting in peace circles helped them cope better with their sentence. In his time sitting in circles at each facility, the RJCOM saw that when staff participated in peace circles alongside youth and the community volunteers, the relationship between the staff and youth improved. Youth at IYC St. Charles expressed genuine respect for a staff person who consistently participated in peace circles and who stayed to played games with the youth immediately after. Both staff and youth expressed the need to develop genuine relationships in and outside peach circles because they provide opportunities community building, fewer incidents, and more continuity within programming. Staff participation also resulted in youth having fewer issues with staff who participated, were more receptive to staff advice, and responded more respectfully to staff directions. The more restorative justice can be wholly adopted into DJJ with fidelity, the safer everyone would be to work towards shared goals.

**Appendix A: FY2023 Visits**

<b>IYC Chicago</b>	<b>24 Visits</b>
<b>IYC Harrisburg</b>	<b>11 Visits</b>
<b>IYC Pere Marquette</b>	<b>11 Visits</b>
<b>IYC St. Charles</b>	<b>33 Visits</b>
<b>IYC Warrenville</b>	<b>25 Visits</b>

**Appendix B: FY2023 Phone Calls**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of Calls</b>
<b>July 2022</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>August 2022</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>September 2022</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>October 2022</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>November 2022</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>December 2022</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>January 2023</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>February 2023</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>March 2023</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>April 2023</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>May 2023</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>June 2023</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>1210*</b>

\* This number may not completely reflect the total number of calls received by the OIJO in FY23 as some data may have been lost or misrecorded

## Appendix C: FY2023 Complaints [Subjects and Excerpts]

### September 2022

- **Youth Safety and Living Unit Assignments**
  - o “When youth like ‘DC’ aren’t safe, don’t feel safe, report that they don’t feel safe, and request to move somewhere where they know they’ll be safe, they aren’t always listened to. ‘DC’ may have been heard by staff and administrators, but he wasn’t listened to. His concerns weren’t prioritized enough to shift operational priorities. ‘D’ requested to move because he wanted to avoid being assaulted but he was moved only after getting hurt, as if his statements of imminent threat weren’t sufficient.”
  - o “When youth like ‘ZT’ request to transfer cottages to navigate away from known negative impulses and influences, they aren’t listened to. ‘Z’ made several of the same request, verbally and in writing, using every available appropriate channel and escalating in his expression of urgency but nothing happened. He was told that staff and administrators would look into it, but nothing happened. He was told it was an “operational need” for him to stay where he was. Months later, after the already negative atmosphere on the cottage worsened and he reached a breaking point where he chose to assault another youth on his cottage- then the move that couldn’t happen, did. The concern is that staff and administrators regularly show youth, like ‘Z’ in this instance, that the best way to be listened to is when they act out physically. This reinforces a dangerous message that many youth receive in the community that their concerns and perspectives are easy to ignore unless they make themselves a spectacle or a problem to be solved.”

### November 2022

- **Staff Absences Hindering Access to Services**

### January 2023

- **Inappropriate Usage of Behavioral Holds (Room Confinement)**
- **Staff Mistreatment- Unprofessional Language and Behavior Towards Youth**

### December 2022

- **Youth Investigations and Notice Requirement**
  - o “The current Department practice regarding investigations, especially those involving staff conduct towards youth, is to restrict substantive access to almost all third parties. That practice can be harmful and unduly restrictive as it relates to this Office because the driving force of this Office is to amplify the voice of young people through independent oversight. There is no effective oversight and there can’t be effective advocacy without access. This Office requires more than just notice of an open investigation. In order to advocate effectively, it requires meaningful access to all the available and relevant details of investigations whenever it involves a young person committed to the Department.”

- “This Office recommends that the Department provide clear written guidance to all Illinois Youth Centers reminding them of their notice obligations especially to youth attorneys or legal representatives of record. Include in that guidance details about the required method for reporting and the steps necessary to document and confirm a youth’s legal representative of record. “

#### **April 2023**

- **“Random” Drug Testing and Potential Harassment**

#### **May 2023**

- **Youth Job Assignment Compensation**

- “This Office [asked] for IDJJ to review and amend its current Administrative Directive on “Monetary Compensation for Youth Assignments” to reflect fair wages for all job assignments and explain the reasoning for any new changes. Further, this Office wants IDJJ to abolish its maximum monthly compensation limit. “

- **Disruption to Facility Operations Following a Major Incident**

- “This Office is concerned that after a major youth disturbance, staff prioritize restoring control through swift punishment but to such an extreme that basic care and services are pushed aside. This practice risked youth safety and regardless of any individual’s youth’s level of involvement in a “dangerous disturbance” the Department is still responsible for making sure youths’ basic needs are met. Basic needs include: food, medical care (both mental and physical), shelter and clothing. Deprivation of any or all these needs in the wake of a major incident is punitive and is not necessary for restoring order.”

- **Stolen/Missing Property Following Youth Absence and Transfer**

- **Inadequate Mental Health Treatment and Subsequent IDOC Transfer**

- “This Office is concerned that ‘PX’ did not receive the best care available to meet his needs in the juvenile system before transferring him to the Department of Corrections. This Office has no confidence that the Illinois Department of Corrections is best suited to provide him “with the quality and quantity of care necessary to allow him to achieve and sustain his own safety.” Quite the opposite. And if IDOC really was the best place for him, this Office is concerned that similarly situated youth committed to IDJJ presenting with very high mental health needs, won’t receive adequate care in IDJJ. The message this sends is harmful and concerning because youth shouldn’t have to choose between prison and performing wellness long enough to return home. “
- “This Office is concerned that IDJJ harmed ‘PX’ and further exacerbated his mental illness and trauma by ignoring his expressed needs, keeping him in spaces he knew was harmful and ultimately pushing him out when he got to be too much.”

- “This Office is concerned that IDJJ did not try every tool available before deciding to transfer a seriously mentally ill youth to prison. ‘PXs’ criminal conviction allowed IDJJ to use an offramp that would not have otherwise been available to them if he was committed as a juvenile. This Office is concerned that the response to youth in IDJJ with significant mental health needs is to push them out or away rather than meeting their needs where they are. This Office can’t be sure that this practice of pushing out young people who are too difficult to treat won’t become the norm rather than the exception.

**June 2023**

- **\*An update to the April Complaint re: “Random” Drug Testing and Potential Harassment**