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Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice to Serve High School Graduates at Newly Repurposed Career & Education Center

SAINT CHARLES - The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) celebrated the grand opening of a newly repurposed secure youth facility today that will specialize in vocational, career, educational, and life skills development opportunities for high school graduates ages 17-20 who are in the custody of IDJJ.

The purpose of the [Phoenix Emerging Adults Career & Education \(PEACE\) Center](#) is to provide a developmentally appropriate setting to equip young adults with the resources, services, and skills needed for safe, successful and sustainable reintegration into the community. It is located on the campus of the former Illinois Youth Center at St. Charles.

"In Illinois, we're not just reimagining justice for young people, we're acting upon that vision," said **Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton**. "Transitioning youth to smaller, community-based centers with expanded resources and opportunities will help our young people heal and realize their full potential. This work will ultimately keep more youth out of the system and better meet their needs post-release."

The PEACE Center offers:

- Career and technical education training and certifications in construction, operating heavy equipment, manufacturing, personal training, barbering, and in-class driver's education
- Behavioral and mental health services, including substance use treatment
- Conflict resolution and anger management programs
- Higher educational opportunities

"The transition to the new model at the PEACE Center is part of IDJJ's [21st Century Transformation Plan](#)," said **Robert Vickery, Interim Director of IDJJ**. "The campus now has a smaller population with programs and services individualized for each young adult and responsive to their unique needs."

Young adults in the custody of IDJJ who are high school graduates and wish to participate in the PEACE Center must submit an application and participate in an interview process. Within seven days of being transferred to the PEACE Center, each young adult signs an individualized contract that includes 36 hours of participation in at least two of the offered programs and requires weekly hours at an assigned work area.

Young adults will work with a multidisciplinary team to create an individualized plan for success at the PEACE Center. The team includes a mental health professional, an educational and vocational professional, a youth and family specialist, a leisure time activities specialist, a direct care staff member, and a chaplain if desired. This team continues to work with the young adult during their time at the PEACE Center, providing adjustments as necessary and ensuring accountability and progress.



“The community partners and volunteers working with us at the PEACE Center are essential to the success of our programs and rehabilitation of our young adults,” **said Rayeshundra Henderson, Assistant Superintendent of Programs at the PEACE Center.**

Community partners and volunteers working with young adults at the PEACE Center include:

- [New Life Centers](#)
- [Northern Illinois University’s Project Flex](#)
- [Elgin Community College](#)
- [Youthbuild](#)
- [Illinois Senator Rachel Ventura](#)
- [Nova Driving School](#)
- [Victory XR/Meta](#)

State Senator Rachel Ventura is also offering a new internship opportunity to two young adults at the PEACE Center.

“I wanted to craft an inclusive internship that would provide guidance and show them that it is possible to have a vision for a bright future – and what a better way to help than to focus on legislation that directly impacts our community,” **said Senator Rachel Ventura (D-43rd District).**

The plans for the PEACE Center included input from young adults in the custody of IDJJ. The idea to use Phoenix in the name of the new center came from young adults who helped shape the identity of what was formerly the Illinois Youth Center (IYC) St. Charles. The phoenix is a mythical golden bird associated with renewal and regeneration that rises from the ashes of its previous life. It is a symbol of hope, life, and better things to come.

“This program has transformational potential for young adults seeking a better path, and I am delighted to know we will have this PEACE Center in St. Charles,” **said State Senator Don DeWitte (R-33rd District).** “Those who have made bad choices as youth and who desire education and job training need support and guidance so they can become productive citizens as they enter adulthood.”

The PEACE Center launched in January of 2024, and more programs are becoming available throughout the remainder of the year. IDJJ did not request any budget increases in the transition to creating the PEACE Center. Funding for the new programming was pulled from existing budgets, including grant funds for Career Technical Education services and some general revenue funds. Staffing levels at the center have remained steady through the transition. The state of Illinois has operated a facility for young men on this campus since 1904.

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The [Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice \(IDJJ\)](#) was created by statute in 2006 with the mandate of safely housing and rehabilitating youth committed to its custody. The mission of IDJJ is to promote community safety and positive youth outcomes by building youth skills and strengthening families.