

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice hosts states working toward juvenile justice reform



*Supt. Idowu of IDJJ speaking to Georgia Dept. of Juvenile Justice's team during a tour at the Illinois Youth Center in Chicago*

**CHICAGO** – The [Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice](#) (IDJJ) recently hosted teams from the [Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice](#) and the [Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs](#). The teams visited IDJJ to learn about child-centered policies and best practices and protocols in juvenile justice. The visits focused on the importance of a multidisciplinary, relational approach to working with young people and effective methods to ensure positive youth development and family engagement as well as strategies to reduce the use of solitary confinement.

Georgia's team of ten visited IDJJ on October 11-12, along with Jennifer Lutz, director of [Stop Solitary for Kids](#) at the [Center for Children's Law & Policy](#). The Oklahoma team of six visited October 25-26 and was joined by Natalie Walker, director of administration at the [Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators](#). The visiting teams included individuals from various positions such as agency administrators, mental and behavioral health specialists, and direct care staff.

Pamela Hill, deputy commissioner of Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice stated, "On behalf of myself and members of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice team, we truly enjoyed meeting Director Mueller, and team. We are immensely grateful for the experience and knowledge we gained. The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice has taken an aggressive approach; reinvesting in community-based programs, educational programming, and evidence-based services for at-risk youth. The staff has been intentional with data to increase opportunities for success and has leveraged best practices to navigate a

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road map that focuses on a young person’s “Exit at Entry” by identifying and providing them with the most appropriate services. We are excited by the opportunity to apply what we have learned to realize improvements in our procedures.”

The teams from Georgia and Oklahoma toured IDJJ’s youth centers in Chicago and Warrenville, with tours being partially led by youth volunteers who answered questions and offered insights into their experiences in IDJJ youth centers.

IDJJ Director Heidi Mueller stated, “We were delighted to host the teams from Georgia and Oklahoma and introduce them to staff and youth at our Chicago and Warrenville youth centers. It is an honor to be designated a National Promising Practice site and share some of our successes with other states who are seeking to continue improving their practices with justice-involved youth.”



*Individuals from the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs pose with IDJJ's Director Mueller (center) & IDJJ staff in front of artwork created by youth in Illinois youth centers that is being exhibited at Weinberg/Newton gallery*

The Oklahoma team also visited [Weinberg/Newton Gallery](#) in Chicago, where they walked through the [Can You See Me?](#) art exhibit that features the artwork of youth participating in art therapy through IDJJ’s partnership with [SkyART](#).

IDJJ is hosting cohorts of juvenile justice administrators and practitioners from other states because of its designation as a National Promising Practice site. The [Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown](#), the [Center for Children’s Law & Policy](#), and the [Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators](#) have formed a collaborative to reduce the use of isolation and promote best practices for young people involved in the juvenile justice system. The collaborative receives applications from jurisdictions seeking to improve their practices and matches them with designated promising practice sites like IDJJ for site visits, peer coaching and technical assistance.

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Promising practice sites are selected for demonstrating effective, youth-and-family-centered policies and practices; success in eliminating the use of solitary confinement as a punishment, and reduction of the use of isolation. IDJJ was first named a National Promising Practice site in 2021 and was again designated as a promising practice site in 2022. Thus far, the Department has hosted practitioners from Arizona, Wisconsin, Georgia and Oklahoma.

Rachel Holt, executive director of the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs stated, “Oklahoma appreciates the opportunity to meet, share and learn from the Illinois DJJ team. It is beneficial to be in person to visit two DJJ sites and interact with multiple levels of staff and youth. The schedule that DJJ created for our visit was broad and exceeded expectations. Every person we met shared their passion, dedication and willingness to assist us in our system improvements. The debriefing session and questions/answer component left no question unanswered. I need to give a special shout out to the incomparable Heidi Mueller, a state director I have long admired but who went above and beyond this week in graciously sharing her and her coworkers’ time and also personally driving our team throughout Chicago in a van! Our team is so grateful for what we have learned, the connections we have made and the support DJJ provided this week and we know will continue to provide to us as we strive to implement the lessons we are learning through our ‘Ending Isolation in Custody’ Capstone.”

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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.