

For Release on October 29, 2024

Kane County Judicial Center Site of YOUTH ARE WORTH IT

Learning Event for Juvenile Detention Facilities

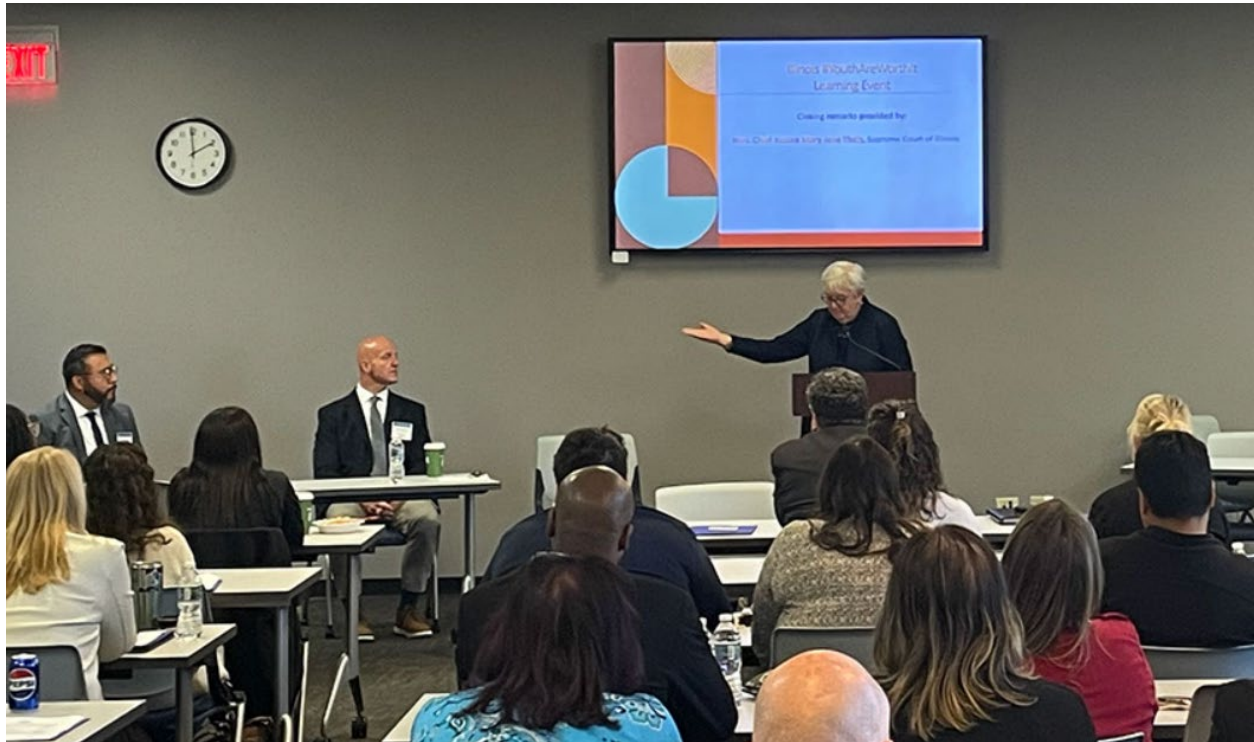
Coordinated by the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (AOIC), on October 9, 2024, the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit (Kane County) hosted the first statewide gathering of temporary juvenile detention facilities. Over 60 participants and stakeholders including Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis and Justice Elizabeth M. Rochford of the Illinois Supreme Court attended the event.

Sixteenth Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Robert Villa welcomed the group and spoke on the importance of collaboration. “One of the first and most surprising things I learned was that Chief Judges have operational and administrative control over their local juvenile detention facility. Nobody really prepares you for how complex an institution juvenile detention facilities can be. They are regulated and monitored by AOIC and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, but funded by ever-changing local county officials, administered by Court Services, and, those with teachers, must work well with the Regional Office of Education. Navigating this menagerie of interested parties would have been impossible on my own. It takes purposeful collaboration in order to sustain these facilities and achieve the excellence our community deserves. The leadership and operational staff I inherited were willing to educate me on what I didn’t know and help me make the best decisions I could right from the beginning of my term. And they will have to do it all over again at the end of my term. That’s why collaboration is paramount to effectively managing our juvenile facilities.”

Lisa Aust, Kane County’s Director of Court Services, gave an opening statement to the assembled group stating, “More and more I understand just how important it is for our staff to be change agents for these youth. We’re not a substitute for treatment, some of the juveniles have major mental health issues and horrible life circumstances that we can’t fix, but how we treat them once they’re in our custody certainly makes a difference for any therapeutic interventions we do later in their cases.”

Juvenile Detention Superintendent Mike Davis led a panel of former detention residents and asked them probing questions about their time spent in the Kane County Juvenile Justice Center, what worked well, and what could be improved. “It was a valuable discussion, a good reminder to all practitioners of the purpose of our work and the need to continue to improve our facilities and approach towards working with our kids,” he said.

Other stakeholders in attendance included Chief Circuit Court Judges, Circuit Judges, Juvenile Delinquency Judges, Directors/Chief Managing Officers (CMOs) of Probation, Juvenile Detention Center Site Superintendents, and Juvenile Detention Center staff. Additional speakers included Chief Circuit Judge John Lowry of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit on the work being done by the Conference of Chief Judges’ Detention Workgroup, and speakers from Peoria and Winnebago County Partners.



Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Theis gives closing remarks at the learning event and thanks Superintendent Mike Davis (seated immediately to her right) for leading a discussion on the lived experiences of detained youth.

In her speech, Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Theis stressed the ongoing importance of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act as well as protecting Illinois' vulnerable populations, including children in juvenile detention settings. She also highlighted the remarkable challenges and opportunities for Illinois Juvenile Detention staff and facilities.

Daniel S. Hunt, AOIC's Director of Probation Services shared in closing, "The learning event was a great success. It was a great opportunity for collaboration, dialogue, and learning in the pursuit of elevating Illinois detention services. Thank you to everyone who participated, and we look forward to building on this gathering."

In a separate statement, the AOIC thanked the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for the grant funding that made the event possible. The AOIC also thanked Sixteenth Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Robert K. Villa, Executive Director of Kane County Court Services Lisa Aust, and the staff of the Sixteenth Judicial Circuit for hosting and facilitating this extraordinary event.