

Fauquier Times-Democrat

- Calendar
- Print Ads
- Classifieds
- Special Sections
- Homesource
- Employment

Clear 56°
5 Day Forecast 

home > fauquier > editorial/opinion

- Regional News
- Loudoun
- Fairfax
- Fauquier
- Clarke
- Rappahannock
- Prince William
- Classifieds
- Marketplace

- Fauquier News
- Home
- Top Stories
- Up Close
- Police/Courts
- Government
- Editorial/Opinion
- Education
- Sports
- Business
- Celebrations
- Obituaries
- Real Estate
- Weekender
- Contact Us



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We can do more to help juvenile offenders

By Carmen Comsti, cdc5a@virginia.edu, Charlottesville
12/07/2004

I am concerned about the efforts improve mental health and educational transitioning for youth departing Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities. I am disappointed in the lack of coverage on this issue.

As a community, we should be concerned about the quality of mental health and education for these youths and help ensure that they have the greatest opportunity to succeed in their second chance.

The DJJ receives sufficient funds to facilitate these young people's transition out of juvenile facilities from the state, but the current procedures of transition allow too many these juveniles to fall through the cracks.

Of these youths, 60 percent of males and 90 percent of females have diagnosed mental health treatment needs.

Also, there have been many cases in which DJJ has not promptly released their educational records to school districts, which directly impedes their transition back into the school system.

We need to pressure the DJJ and the Virginia General Assembly to make sure these needs are not forgotten after these youths leave these facilities.

There are organizations like JustChildren, located in Charlottesville, who are working to ensure that the DJJ provides these juveniles with adequate services during this transition.

We as a community should actively advocate this cause for our youth.

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