North Carolina Department of Public Safety
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Roy Cooper, Governor
Eddie M. Buffaloe, Jr., Secretary

William L. Lassiter, Deputy Secretary

MEMORANDUM

To: Mecklenburg County Commissioners

From: William L. Lassiter, Deputy Secretary

RE: Removal of funding/closure of Mecklenburg Juvenile Detention Center

Date: May 24, 2022

The Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) and the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office have built an outstanding partnership to serve juveniles under age 18 in juvenile detention.

In 2019, Mecklenburg County leadership determined that Mecklenburg County could best serve its own youth in detention—allowing for greater flexibility in court scheduling, improved education services through partnerships with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, and better access to family members and community resources to which Mecklenburg County juveniles will return. With a new population of 16- and 17- year-olds in juvenile jurisdiction following "Raise the Age" implementation, Mecklenburg County stepped up to create a plan and a facility to bring better outcomes for youth and families.

DJJDP supported Mecklenburg County throughout the opening of the center and continues to work with Mecklenburg Juvenile Detention Center (MJDC) leadership. The 72-bed center is well-suited to house juveniles, with rooms dedicated to education and other programming, including a library and on-site training space. This relationship has worked well for the state and many others, including justice-involved juveniles and their families in Mecklenburg County. Also, it furthers longstanding state policy for the State and local counties to share the responsibility for juvenile detention services. *See* G.S. 143B-819, -820, and -821.

Without Mecklenburg County's facility, the Division would have difficulty finding space to house juveniles who are in secure custody, and even greater difficulty housing Mecklenburg County youth close to home. The number of available state juvenile justice detention beds are already stretched thin due in part to changes in law mandating that all juveniles must be held in juvenile

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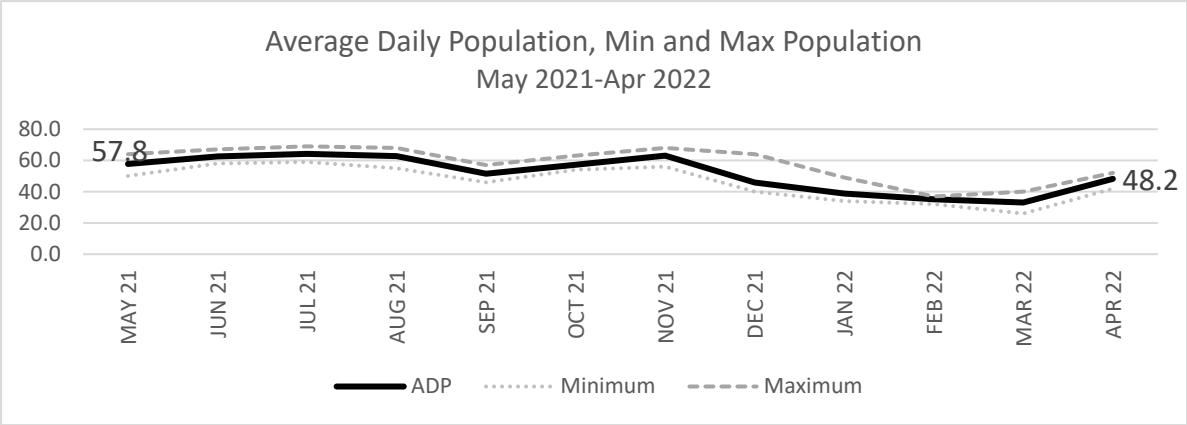
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detention rather than jail before/during (and in some cases after) court hearings, even if cases have been transferred from juvenile court to superior court.

In sending Mecklenburg County youth to other detention centers across the state, the county will lose $295 per juvenile per day: the $135 county portion of stay paid to the state and $160 the state previously paid Mecklenburg County to house Mecklenburg County juveniles. Additionally, Mecklenburg County will lose revenue of $270 per day per juvenile (new rate as of July 1, 2022) for those youth housed at MJDC who originated in other counties. Closing Mecklenburg Juvenile Detention Center could result in a loss of $6 million for the county.

The vast majority of juveniles housed at the facility are Mecklenburg County juveniles. Over the past twelve months, Mecklenburg Juvenile Detention Center processed 395 admissions. 75% of admissions (297) were for Mecklenburg County youth, averaging 25 Mecklenburg County admissions per month. The center housed Mecklenburg County youth for 12,601 resident days.



Several alternatives to consider include:

- Maintaining the operation of the Mecklenburg Juvenile Detention Center.
- Extending the contract until the end of the next fiscal year (June 30, 2023) when the state could bring on more capacity in the system to allow a greater number of Mecklenburg County youth to be housed at the nearby Cabarrus campus.
- Transitioning the center operations from the Sheriff's Department to another county entity, similar to Durham and Guilford Counties.
- Allowing the state to lease the facility and operating it as a state-run juvenile detention center. With this option, the county could maintain its on-site administrative offices and cooking facilities, but the state would staff the juvenile residential section of the center and continue to train staff in the provided training space.

We stand ready to work with the county manager, Sheriff's Office and county leadership, as we have in the past, on solutions to this situation that minimize adverse impact on the youth and families of Mecklenburg County.