

**Department of
Juvenile Justice**

**Feasibility Study of
Creating a Juvenile Justice
Apprenticeship Program**

*In response to:
Chapter 0003 of the 2012
Virginia Acts of Assembly
(The Appropriation Act,
Item 410 (2012))*



October 1, 2012

Executive Summary

In response to language included in the 2012 Appropriation Act, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) prepared a report on the feasibility of creating a juvenile justice apprenticeship program for the purpose of recruiting, training, and employing students who may be interested in pursuing careers in the juvenile justice system. This report discusses the potential benefits that the apprenticeship program would have for the DJJ and for the apprentices.

The apprenticeship program will be made up of students selected from the Criminal Justice program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) who are interested in working in the criminal justice field. The apprenticeship will train students to become juvenile correctional officers (JCOs) by having them complete DJJ's JCO Basic Skills Training as well as a three-credit online course at VCU. Students would then be employed as apprentice JCOs or related positions. VCU is currently participating in a successful program similar to the one proposed with DJJ with Henrico County's Sheriff's Office.

It is recommended that DJJ pursue a partnership with VCU and implement an apprenticeship program. Students involved in the program will gain valuable work experience that will guide them in their future career paths. Additionally, the program is expected to expand the applicant pool for juvenile correctional officers (JCOs) positions in DJJ. This will improve the quality of work within the facilities by increasing the number of high quality employees and decreasing the workload and overtime hours of current employees by filling current vacancies.

Introduction

Item 410 of the 2012 Appropriation Act:

“The Department of Juvenile Justice shall assess the feasibility of creating a juvenile justice apprenticeship program for the purpose of recruiting, training and employing students who may be interested in pursuing careers in the juvenile justice system, and who would be employed as apprentice juvenile correctional officers or related positions, as a potential strategy to assist the department in filling its current vacancies or supplementing existing staff. As part of its assessment, the department shall review the experience of similar programs at the state or local level in other jurisdictions. The department shall provide a report on its findings and any recommendations by October 1, 2012, to the Secretary of Public Safety and the Chairmen of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees.”

For the past several years, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) has experienced difficulty recruiting and retaining juvenile correctional officers (JCOs), entry level positions that are responsible for the security and supervision of juvenile offenders in the juvenile correctional centers (JCCs). As a result of this issue, the DJJ Human Resources team developed a recruitment plan that included strategies to expand the quality of the applicant pool for JCO positions.

One of the strategies included in the recruitment plan was to explore the possibility of establishing internship programs with colleges and universities that offer degree programs in criminal justice. DJJ contacted and met with faculty from Virginia Commonwealth University’s (VCU) Criminal Justice Program to review an internship program that VCU established in 2011 with the Henrico Sheriff’s Office and the Henrico County Department of Human Resources.

Student Basic Jailor Academy

This partnership offers students the opportunity to attend a Student Basic Jailor Academy while taking three online credit hours during the summer session. Students receive six additional credit hours for the Academy. Upon completion of the Academy, students receive certification as a correctional deputy from the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Academy graduates are also eligible for employment in the Henrico County Sheriff’s office.

The Academy is nine weeks of training. Participants must maintain good standing in the Academy and in their academics. The program has graduated 17 participants in the 2011 class and 29 students in the 2012 class. The Sheriff’s office has hired Academy graduates for full-time and part-time positions. Part-time officers are used to augment the full-time staff, and work schedules are determined based on the students’ class schedule. Academy graduates have been hired for full-time positions after receiving their degrees from VCU.

The Academy has proven to be a mutually beneficial program for the Sheriff’s office and VCU. The experience and the credentials that the students received prepared them for full-time employment and increased their likelihood of getting employment in their field after graduation.

The Academy has provided the Sheriff's office with a pool of trained and highly skilled applicants for part-time and full-time positions.

Recommendation

Based on the review of the success of the Student Basic Jailor Academy, it is recommended that DJJ pursue a similar partnership with VCU and implement an apprenticeship program during the 2013 summer semester.

Conclusion

Establishing a partnership with the VCU Criminal Justice Program will provide an excellent resource for expanding the applicant pool for JCO positions in DJJ. VCU will provide a preliminary screening to determine student referrals. Students referred by VCU will go through DJJ's selection process, and students who meet the selection criteria will be accepted for participation in the DJJ JCO Basic Skills training program.

JCO Basic Skills is an eight week training in which students engage in an in-depth study of the juvenile justice system; learn how to communicate with adolescents, particularly those with special needs; interact with fellow staff; and learn how to handle emergency situations. It includes both classroom instruction and on-site observations and mentoring. While completing JCO Basic Skills, students will also complete the three-credit online course at VCU. Students who complete the Basic Skills training will be eligible for placement in part-time and full-time positions. The apprenticeship program will improve the quality of work within the facilities by increasing the number of high quality employees and decreasing the workload and overtime hours of current employees by filling current vacancies.