



State of Oklahoma
OFFICE OF JUVENILE AFFAIRS

Steven Buck, Executive Director

May 9, 2017

OJA Colleagues,

When I accepted the position as Executive Director for the Office of Juvenile Affairs, I spent time visiting our secure care facilities, group homes and detention centers just talking to staff and the youth in our care about the challenges our agency faces.

A theme quickly emerged from those visits, our institutional staff does some of the hardest work in Oklahoma with some of the most difficult kids in our state; and you do this in facilities not designed for their current use. It's time to invest in a long term plan that addresses the unique needs of kids placed in OJA secure facilities and improves the safety of secure care staff.

On May 9, 2017; both House and Senate of the Oklahoma Joint Committee on Appropriation and Budget (OJCAB) introduced legislation ([HB2387](#)) that tasks OJA, OMES, and the Commissioners of the Land Office with analyzing the most cost effective strategy to consolidate our three institutions, and construct one centralized state of the art medium secure facility on the COJC property. The bill also requires the agency to give consideration to the repurposing of the SWOJC & OJCG facilities.

What we have right now is legislation and **not** law. The legislative process will continue and even if passed; there will still be much work to do; analyzing which plan is the best fit. Because we have a time period that presents some uncertainty, I understand the fear and concern this will bring. It is the responsibility of the OJA leadership team to keep you informed of changes, decisions and the next steps in this process.

The decision to consolidate to one campus is not a negative reflection on the hard work being done by staff members at SWOJC or OJCG. Consolidating into one, centrally located, redesigned campus would address security issues, provide equitable education and recreation for youth, therapeutic and trauma-related treatment, increase family engagement and alleviate the facility safety issues staff deal with every day.

Here are the **facts** related to forthcoming legislation:

- If passed, it directs OJA leadership and Board of Directors to recommend to Governor Fallin, a plan to construct a new facility on COJC property through either, bond financing or a lease agreement through the Commissioners of the Land Office.
- The bill includes language that requires OJA to work with partners to develop plans for the repurposing of SWOJC and OJCG campuses.
- If passed, the bill requires OJA to make a recommendation to the Governor.

It is my promise to you that throughout this process our leadership team and governing board will be transparent, engage staff and make a decision that is in the best interest of the youth we serve and supports our responsibility to the state of Oklahoma. I encourage you to visit the main page of our agency website (www.ok.gov/oja) to read the bill language and reach out to Terry Smith (405-530-2881) with any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you for your continued work,
Steven Buck – OJA Executive Director