



TampaNewsAndTalk.com

Al Mccray
Managing Editor

Bad Children Belong in the Polk County Jail

Part 1, Senate Bill 2112 and its impact on Juvenile Justice



Where Children are locked up in Polk County

Sheriff Grady Judd

The juvenile system in Florida is undergoing corrective surgery and a long overdue critical evaluation of their department, staff, services, and vendor relationships, procedures and methods of operation. There are bound to be productive and corrective changes with major improvements. These changes are being driven and brought on by the state's and counties' budgetary woes, appointment of Wansley Walters as agency head, and Senate Bill 2112 authored by J.D. Alexander, a Republican from Lake Wales. The bottom line is simple: The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) might be getting out of the juvenile lock up business, become less wasteful of state

resources, and do a better job at helping at risk juveniles with better management of resources.

Of all the coming changes, Senate Bill 2112 is the one that has gotten the most scrutiny and negative comments from the community, Church groups, Civil Rights organizations and social scientists. There are many rumors floating around about what Senate Bill 2112 would do to the current juvenile system and what's happening at the Polk County Jail. Some of the main rumors are;

- A.) All bad children in central Florida could be locked up in a centralized Polk County Jail,
- B.) Detention deputies at the Polk County use Billy clubs and chemical agents against children in lock up,
- C.) The children in lock up would have direct contact with adult inmates and other adults.
- D.) A central Polk County lock up of children would cause undue hardships for parents visiting their bad children.
- E.) Several people told me that Sheriff Judd is pushing the centralization of bad children for his long term state wide political gain.

Senate Bill 2112 would allow local jurisdictions in the state to take charge of delinquent children. Currently the Department of Juvenile Justice has controlled over troubled children. Senate Bill 2112 would give the local authorities complete control of delinquent children. This local control would allow the county commissions or governing body or the county Sheriff's office to detain pre-adjudicated children. The time period of detention could last up to 21 days. Based on intake scoring after an arrest, children can go home in guardians' custody, go home with monitoring, or be locked up.

I think it would be great if the DJJ would get out the lock up business of troubled children. What started out as a way of applying uniformity of standards, state safe guards of troubled children and over all data tracking of troubled youth became an agency in crisis?

One major issue with DJJ was the state thought they knew how to better manage delinquent children than the local authorities including parents. Under the current system, counties pay a different cost to house troubled youth.

In Hillsborough County the daily cost, where I live, its almost \$290 per day in a DJJ controlled facilities for bad children. Youths that are housed in the Polk County Jail (a non DJJ state facility) cost about \$94.78 per day. The DJJ payment scales for counties are based on the wealthy counties making of the difference for less wealthy counties. In the adult jail in Hillsborough County, the cost is about \$100.06 per day.

You can see what a burden it is paying \$290 per day instead of \$94.78? All the youths under DJJ's control get for the \$290 per day is basically a cot to sleep on and three meals. They also get around the clock supervision by adults. Of course they get transportation to and from court and basic medical attention. I think you would get a better return if you would take the troubled youth to Disney World for week than paying \$2030 for a week in lock up at The JDC (Juvenile Detention Center). If a child is held for three weeks the cost to Hillsborough County is \$6090 vs. \$1,990.33 for the Polk County jail. The Hillsborough Sheriff Jail Department does not have their final figures yet for housing children, but it will be, I think, similar to Polk County.

With the possible new found saving from Senate Bill 2112, I am sure there will be inter-county turf wars over who controls the money, who is in charge, and how the money will be allocated.

In today's shrinking revenue streams at both the local and state level, you can easily see the economic advantage of local control. A few years ago Hillsborough County paid the state around \$8,300,000 per year for basic baby-sitting service. The last fiscal year the tab for baby-sitting service was just over \$6,000,000.

As Commissioner Kevin Beckner once said to me, the millions the county would save, if the county had control, can go toward other services to actively address bad children's behavior, provide funding for prevention and promote vocational opportunities.

Last year I spent several hours with Wansley Walters and her staff when she was the director of The Miami-Dade Juvenile Lockup. (I can't recall the exact name of that agency, sorry).

What I learned from Ms. Walters, after many thorough discussions is that the answer to juvenile delinquency is a holistic approach to prevention of delinquency, and the answer is not by just locking children up? Of course you will always have hard core children that should require confinement. Ms. Walter's staff employed a number of outreaches to the juvenile's home life, meeting with parents, church, school, and neighborhood and with their friends. The staff treated delinquency by learning as much as they could about the child's overall lifestyle and the elements in that life style that maybe was a contributing factor to delinquency. This approach has drastically driven down the recidivism in Miami-Dade County. I expect to see more of this on a state wide basis.

Next article part 2:

An inspection tour of the Polk County Jail for Children: The truth about Grady Judd's Juvenile lockup (addressing the rumors)

The link below is a Press conference by Southern Law Poverty Center and the community's thoughts of Grady Judd and Senate Bill 2112.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJTIdaG1UE4&list=UUQhzyGqt_nlVbVyvmW2X7Iq&feature=plcp

Al Mccray

Managing Editor

813 244 0664

www.TampaNewsAndTalk.com

5000 Business Cards Only \$99.95
Design Not Included



-
- Business Cards • Postcards • Brochures • Door Hangers
 - Rack Cards • Logos • Banners • Envelopes • Letterhead
 - Magnets • Carbonless Invoices • And Much More!
-

813-657-7800

Email: al@goiguana.com

Goiguana.com

438 E. Brandon Blvd. • Ste. 28 • Brandon, FL 33511