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**Ohio Department of Youth Services Revamps Process for
Approving Youth Release**

COLUMBUS, Ohio - The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) will begin implementation of a new process to approve youth who are ready to be released from custody. Once a youth is placed in the custody of DYS, the department is charged with determining when that youth should be released. The plan preserves the commitment to protecting public safety while focusing on the treatment needs of each youth that must be met to reduce the chance of reoffending.

"I want to make sure we are making sound, informed decisions about release that are consistent with public safety," said Department of Youth Services Director Tom Stickrath. "The complexity of the previous system seemed to lead to uncertainty for the youth and their families as to how and when the youth would be released. Under the revised process, there will be increased consistency in the decision making process because the parameters for a youth's release, or continuance, are clearly defined. "

The new plan shifts release decisions away from a matrix of predetermined sentences, toward an evidence-based approach. Included in this approach is an individualized unified case plan that guides youth treatment from intake through time on parole, and requires DYS to meet those treatment needs at the onset of their commitment. Once a youth completes their minimum sentence, they will not be continued except in cases where they are considered a risk to public safety, there is time added for serious misconduct while in custody, additional treatment is needed, or when other special circumstance are determined by the full Release Authority Board.

The new release guidelines were developed over the past year with input from many stakeholders including judges, court administrators, victim advocates, DYS staff, prosecutors, academics, service providers, defenders, and attorneys involved in the DYS class action reform effort, *S.H. v. Stickrath*.

The new plan reflects the ongoing reforms within DYS including those set out in the Stipulation for Injunctive Relief in the *S.H.* case. Lead counsel, Al Gerhardstein, stated, “This Release Authority Plan goes as far as we can go to make a youth’s commitment to DYS a positive step toward reducing future criminal activity by that youth. Structural barriers including mandatory sentencing laws that actually cause increased criminal activity can only be addressed by the legislature. But this is a great first step. Director Stickrath and the Governor are to be commended for adopting this plan.”

DYS is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio. DYS is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. DYS operates eight correctional and rehabilitation facilities and provides parole services from six regional sites.

The plan will be subjected to rigorous review in the initial months to ensure it accomplishes its goals. The terms of the plan and of the entire stipulation can be viewed at www.dys.ohio.gov or www.childrenslawky.org.