

**PRESS RELEASE – DYS CONSENT DECREE TO END; REFORMS IN PLACE**

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**Columbus, Ohio. December 7, 2015.** On December 8, 2015 at 2:00 p.m., United States District Court Judge Algenon Marbley will have a hearing to determine if court supervision of reforms at the Ohio Department of Youth Services should be terminated. Plaintiffs – the youth incarcerated in Ohio’s youth prisons – and Defendant Director Harvey Reed all agree that Court supervision should end. Plaintiffs’ class counsel Al Gerhardstein and Kim Tandy will be in court along with the court appointed monitors and representatives from DYS. The United States Justice Department will also be represented as it has a companion case also set for termination.

In 2008, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) of Ohio settled *S.H. v. Reed* (previously *S.H. v. Stickrath*) after four years of litigation on the harmful and unconstitutional conditions faced by the youth who were placed in their custody. Since that date, DYS has worked cooperatively with experts and plaintiff counsel to create a safer and more youth-focused system. The culture inside and outside of the state’s juvenile correctional facilities has dramatically changed.

Some issues addressed collaboratively include reducing the use of force and seclusion, redesigning the release process and planning for reentry, improving education, increasing family engagement, and offering mental and behavioral health treatment. Reforms include ending seclusion as a disciplinary sanction, creating a youth advocate program, and developing a RECLAIM program to further reduce the population of youth in the state’s juvenile facilities.

Through different configurations of RECLAIM, a risk assessment process, and implementing evidence-based treatment, tremendous strides were accomplished to keep youth in their communities and reduce the number of youth in state facilities. In 2008, the average daily population of youth in state correctional facilities hovered around 1500 while today it is 508. This reduction also was assisted through the closure of numerous facilities leading to an annual savings to the state of 62 million a year.

Class counsel Al Gerhardstein, of Gerhardstein & Branch Co. LPA, says, “Judge Marbley and the monitoring team have worked closely with all of us to ensure that violence is reduced and evidence based treatment is increased. We are very grateful to the Court and to DYS for the steady improvements on behalf of Ohio’s youth.” Co-Counsel Kim Brook Tandy of the Children’s Law Center agrees adding, “there is great satisfaction in seeing the system now account for differences in kids and I truly have hope for better outcomes for youth that face state juvenile justice involvement. This is not an ending, but a beginning for Ohio to take better care of its most vulnerable population. Ohio is poised to become a national model.”