



# NEWS

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Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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## **NO NEW COVID-19 CASES IN NEARLY THREE WEEKS; DJJ CONTINUES TO DELIVER SERVICES TO YOUTH AT BON AIR CORRECTIONAL CENTER**

**Richmond, VA, May 22** –There are many challenges associated with delivering services in correctional settings across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, employees at the Department of Juvenile Justice’s (DJJ) Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center have found innovative ways to provide programming while ensuring the safety of youth and staff.

“Bon Air staff are thinking outside the box to provide safe and effective delivery of critical services to our youth while incorporating social distancing and other health safeguards,” noted Lekeisha Henry, Bon Air’s assistant superintendent for the Community Treatment Model.

DJJ began preparing for the potential impact of the coronavirus prior to the Governor’s declaration of a state of emergency on March 12. Despite their efforts, a Bon Air youth tested positive for COVID-19 on April 5. Bon Air immediately began aggressive screening and testing of residents that included those with mild symptoms, such as an elevated temperature of 99 degrees. To further control the spread, Bon Air took the crucial measure of instituting a period of quarantine after consultation with the local health department. Overall, 29 residents have tested positive for COVID-19, with no new cases since May 3. Almost all of the youth were asymptomatic and none required hospitalization. The quarantine was fully lifted on April 24 following a deep cleaning of all units. All residents who tested positive have fully recovered.

Although some modified treatment continued during the quarantine, an even greater spectrum of programs are being delivered. Small group-based work occurs every weekday as part of DJJ’s Community Treatment Model, with social distancing

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between residents and staff members strictly observed. When youth are not in the unit dayroom with their assigned small group, they may be receiving individual therapy or having personal time during which they may relax, read, write or engage in other in-room activities with the doors ajar. With the arrival of warm weather, outdoor recreation also has resumed. Each unit participates in outdoor activity in small groups a minimum of 3-4 times a week.

DJJ's education staff are providing virtual services on the units each weekday through on-line course work and individual learning packets. Youth have access to computers in the living units; all high school classes are available with individualized curriculum, electives, and graded coursework. This allows the residents to complete credits for promotion and graduation requirements. Additionally, online college courses will resume next week. With "mini-libraries" in each residential unit, youth have access to new reading material that includes fiction, non-fiction, academic support, and college preparatory materials. "Keeping our residents' minds active and curious has been especially important during this pandemic," noted Dr. Melinda Boone, DJJ's Interim Superintendent/Educational Consultant.

"We will continue to be strategic in our efforts to address the health and safety of Bon Air's staff and residents, and hold these concerns as paramount," said DJJ Director Valerie Boykin. "But we also will continue to provide the rehabilitative and education services our residents need and deserve, perhaps in new ways."

For the latest information on DJJ's response the COVID-19 situation, please visit DJJ's COVID-19 Resources for Parents and Stakeholders webpage at this link:

<http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pages/about-djj/covid.htm>

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