Clark County Commissioners approve JDAI grant

Audit of probation, courts, Community Corrections could happen this year

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The Evening News and The Tribune

CLARK COUNTY — Two weeks after denying a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative grant funded by the Indiana Judicial Center, the Clark County Commissioners voted to give the grant the go ahead Thursday.

The commissioners voted 2-1 to accept the grant, which will fund the creation of two positions, a JDAI coordinator and a juvenile probation officer. Additionally, the grant will fund about $36,000 worth of renovations at the county's juvenile detention center, said Circuit Court Presiding Judge Vicki Carmichael, whose court handles juvenile cases.

"I'm thrilled," Carmichael said after the meeting. "This is definitely going to move us in the right direction. We are going to do some great things with juveniles with some alternatives, get the overcrowding issue under control and do what we need to do for kids."

The capacity of the juvenile detention center is 14 children, Carmichael said. The center had 18 inmates in residence Thursday, Carmichael said the JDAI program will identify and implement alternatives to incarceration like day reporting, evening reporting, home incarceration, house arrest and drug and alcohol programs.

The home detention component will be run through the county's probation department, which led Commissioner John Perkins to vote against accepting the grant. Perkins said that he would prefer that Clark County Community Corrections provide the services for the home incarceration component of the program.

"I see no reason that the monitoring of an ankle bracelet for a person in home incarceration can't all be done through Community Corrections, not through probation, not through a juvenile court," Perkins said. "I think it's just duplication of services."

Carmichael was accompanied at the meeting by JDAI State Coordinator Michelle Tennell and Indiana Department of Correction Youth Services Executive Director Mike Dempsey. Dempsey said that having children participate in an adult home incarceration program, such as the one run through Community Corrections, would violate best practices.

Perkins said he'd like to see a juvenile home detention officer hired in Community Corrections. He added that he'd like to see the home incarceration program, or HIP, run through the county probation department done away with, and the service be provided solely out of Community Corrections.

Perkins said that he was aware of at least one case in which an individual assigned to the probation department's HIP did not have his ankle bracelet activated for months after being assigned.

"It's not uncommon knowledge. This is a small community in this building, and it didn't take long for somebody to figure out that these people weren't being monitored," Perkins said. "That's another big reason, I think, that Community Corrections, which does monitor these people 24-7, should be in charge of all the home-incarcerated people, because obviously, if these people are not being monitored, what use is it?"

The JDAI grant will fund the two positions through June 30. Carmichael said she's already in the process of applying for the grant to be renewed.

COURTS, PROBATION, COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS TO BE AUDITED?

Commissioner Rick Stephenson announced that the county commissioners are interested in pursuing a grant through the National Center for State Courts that would fund a comprehensive audit of the county's courts, probation department and Community Corrections.
Stephenson said the county’s maximum cost for the program would be $5,000, and noted that the county council supports the audit program. County Council President Barbara Hollis agreed that the program had the council’s support.

“That way, we can go through and we’ll see manpower studies, duplication of efforts and everything,” Stephenson said. “That way, we can streamline everything and make it a lot better operation, business-wise.”

However, before the grant can be pursued and the audit performed, the judges in each of Clark County’s Circuit Courts would have to approve the audit.

Carmichael said she was unsure whether or not she could support the program.

“I certainly support the work of the National Center for State Courts,” Carmichael said. “But I don’t know exactly what is being requested here, so I don’t know if I can say I support that or not.”

Carmichael said she was hearing about the program for the first time, and the other judges had not had a conversation about it.