
OVERCROWDING

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Overcrowding in juvenile detention seriously jeopardizes the effective operation and overall safety of the facility. Overcrowding exists whenever the population exceeds the facility's design or program capacity.

Design Capacity is defined as the number of people that can safely occupy a building or space as determined by:

- the original architectural design and any building modifications
- licensing, accreditation, regulatory authorities
- building codes of the Fire Marshall

Program Capacity is defined as the number of personnel (program, security, support) and the amount of funding necessary to effectively operate the facility consistent with established standards.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM:

Experience by juvenile detention practitioners and scientific research have produced evidence of harmful effects of overcrowding in juvenile detention facilities:

- Overcrowding increases the danger to juveniles of suicide, physical assaults on one another and accidental injuries.
- Overcrowding increases the danger to staff of physical assaults by juveniles.
- Overcrowding disrupts and may eliminate productive programs and services.
- Overcrowding contributes to a deterioration in the conditions of confinement.
Deterioration in the conditions may create sufficient harm to juveniles so as to violate their constitutional rights.
- Overcrowding violates the goals and objectives as defined in the NJDA juvenile detention definition statement adopted October 31, 1989.

POSITION STATEMENT:

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) opposes overcrowding in juvenile detention. Whenever a facility's design or program capacity is exceeded it is inappropriate and harmful to the provision of helpful services to juveniles.

NJDA believes juvenile detention is an appropriate and effective component of a well designed juvenile justice system which provides a variety of programs and services. While there may be a short term economic advantage to exceeding a facility's design or program capacity it is counter-productive to providing for the health, safety and well being of juveniles. Overcrowding turns juvenile detention facilities into unsafe warehouses for youth.

NJDA supports administrative, legislative and judicial actions to limit the population of juvenile detention facilities to their design and program capacity. Such action would be an integral part of a comprehensive strategy of programs and services which balance the needs of at risk and delinquent juveniles with public safety.
