DuPage, Kane Counties Discuss Regional Concept for youth detainees and work release programs

St. Charles, IL … In an effort to pool resources and productively work together to save taxpayer money, DuPage County Board Chairman Dan Cronin and Kane County Board Chairman Karen McConnaughay announced two potential plans to join services for youth detainees and the adult work release program.

“Combining services between our youth home and Kane County is a great example of how government can work collaboratively together at a reduced cost for taxpayers,” said Cronin.

According to Cronin, the decision to combine the youth home with Kane County has been driven by the county’s successful diversion programs for at-risk juveniles that have lowered the need for incarceration.

“We are a victim of our own success. Our DuPage County juvenile justice system has done an outstanding job in providing quality programs that have decreased the need for incarceration,” said Cronin. “DuPage County has nearly 260,000 juveniles and our Youth Home averages 23 of those juveniles at any given time. The numbers prove that our programs work and are successful in helping deter juvenile crime.”

The Kane County Juvenile Justice Center currently serves as a regional facility as it provides services to youth from DeKalb, Kendall and McHenry counties. McConnaughay said she welcomed further discussion with DuPage County.

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“This is exactly what governments should be doing. It is the kind of regional cooperation that taxpayers want to see. They expect it because it makes sense. We should have more consolidation of services on a regional basis. We have to,” said McConnaughay.

Kane County’s juvenile detention center was constructed with 80 beds but has a long-term capacity of 160. McConnaughay said the facility has room for the additional DuPage juveniles.

DuPage County board member Robert Larsen said the youth home has been underutilized in previous years. It was originally built to house 90 juveniles but currently has a daily population of about 24.

While the detainee population continues to decrease, so does the Youth Home’s $3 million operating budget, which is expected to have a $400,000 operational shortfall for Fiscal Year 2012.

“Not only is our youth home underutilized but it’s also running a $400,000 shortfall because the state has failed to meet its financial obligations and instead left it up to DuPage residents to pick up the tab. It’s time that we have a rational discussion on how we spend taxpayer dollars,” said Larsen.

Between the $400,000 operational shortfall and the projected savings realized under this option to merge with Kane County, Cronin said DuPage taxpayers could save well over $1 million annually.

“It’s important that we invest taxpayer money in the most responsible way possible while maintaining the integrity of our juvenile justice programs,” said Cronin.

Kane County Chief Judge F. Keith Brown said his facility already serves as a regional facility and welcomes the possible merger with DuPage County.

“Kane County has a fantastic facility and one of the top programs in the state for our juvenile detainees. We are a regional facility because of our size and efficiency. We are able to provide quality services at a reasonable cost,” he said.

DuPage County Board member Paul Fichtner said the Finance Committee will discuss the option to move forward with a Kane County agreement on August 9.

“It’s extremely important that we look at all of our options. If Kane County can provide essentially the same services for our juveniles at a reduced cost, then I think it’s an option that we must consider,” said Fichtner, who also serves as chairman of the Finance Committee.

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The discussions regarding the youth detention centers have also lead into conversations about relocating the Kane County Sheriff’s work release program to the space currently used by the DuPage County Youth Home.

“It’s fair to say that we are looking at all of our options to combine efforts in order to serve residents in the most cost effective way. Government can no longer afford to expand, instead we need to work together to serve our residents in a way that makes sense and is cost effective,” said Cronin.

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