

New juvenile rehabilitation center coming to Pierce County. Here's what we know so far

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Forty-three inmates at overcrowded youth detention centers in Washington were allegedly moved without knowledge of where they were going, and without access to a phone call or lawyer. By Fox - Seattle

A medium security, state-operated juvenile rehabilitation center for youth will open in unincorporated Pierce County, according to the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Juvenile Rehabilitation, or JR, is the state's juvenile custody and treatment program for young people up to 25 years old who are convicted of crimes.

The news comes after DCYF announced July 12 that it was transferring 43 young people with adult sentences from [Green Hill School](#) in Chehalis to the Department of Corrections, the state's adult prison agency, according to a [press release](#). The transfers were made to alleviate overcrowding at Green Hill that led to unsafe conditions as the juvenile rehabilitation center reached 236 young people, which is about 30% above its capacity of 180.

A week before the transfers, [DCYF also announced](#) the suspension of intakes at Green Hill and [Echo Glen Children's Center](#) due to the rising numbers of youth entering juvenile rehabilitation.

DCYF Director of Public Affairs Allison Krutsinger told The News Tribune Thursday that the department has identified a vacant building owned by a private entity in unincorporated Pierce County for the new facility. She declined to share the location of the facility because of ongoing lease negotiations complicated by some unexpected questions the department received from the private entity about two days ago, she said.

She estimated the facility could open in six months, by the end of the calendar year, but it could take longer. DCYF is working on resolving the questions they've received from the private entity this week, she said.

The News Tribune reached out to DCYF to ask for additional information about those questions from the private entity and is waiting for a response.

The News Tribune also asked what the new facility will cost and how it will be funded. DCYF Communications Administrator Nancy Gutierrez wrote in an email that DCYF will use funding from the state budget in the 2025 fiscal year for the project, and then submit

a request for additional funding for their supplemental budget and ongoing operations in the biennium. She said DCYF does not yet have an estimate of the project's total cost because it is too early in the process, but said she would tell The News Tribune when she gets that number.

What do we know about the location and the size of the new DCYF facility?

The identified building in Pierce County will be much smaller than Green Hill or Echo Glen, with only 16 beds. Green Hill currently has [173 funded beds](#) and Echo Glen has [94 funded beds](#), according to DCYF overview sheets.

16 beds was the capacity of the E&T (Evaluation and Treatment) center for adults that existed at the building in Pierce County previously, according to Gutierrez.

According to the [Washington State Health Care Authority](#), E&T facilities can offer both voluntary and involuntary treatment to individuals with mental health disorders and are designed to provide treatment typically in a highly-structured setting for those whose needs were not met by lower-level intervention services.

Because the building is already constructed and served a similar function to what this new juvenile facility will provide, it was an attractive choice and will accommodate an expedited timeline to alleviate capacity constraints at the existing juvenile rehabilitation centers, Krutsinger said.

The new facility will be a “medium security” facility, which means that it will have two-way locking doors that prevent entry and prevent exit and largely meet education, programming, behavioral health and therapeutic needs within the facility, she said. This is different from the minimum security [community facilities](#) that allow young people to be out in the community and attending school outside of the center with supervision and structure. Whether youth are placed in a minimum, medium or maximum security facility depends on several factors, including their sentence type and individual evaluations.

A medium security facility can also house youth designated for a minimum security setting, so this center will be flexible to accommodate changes in the number of youth in juvenile rehabilitation, Krutsinger said.

The Pierce County facility will take in young people convicted of crimes who would otherwise be placed at Green Hill or Echo Glen or potentially a community facility. It will focus on serving youth with particularly severe behavioral or mental health needs, according to Krutsinger.

The department plans to hire staff members with backgrounds in psychology and psychiatry and to contract with therapeutic service providers to provide care at the facility, Krutsinger said.

While units to provide this intensive care exist at Green Hill and Echo Glen, DCYF believes that offering these services on a smaller, separate campus is a better alternative, according to Krutsinger. She said bigger juvenile rehabilitation campuses can be overstimulating or triggering and hinder these services.

“The vision is you would see more of that therapeutic mental health, psychiatry, psychology more infused in the programming,” she said.

Krutsinger said that conversations about the new facility were happening internally for several months before the spike in resident numbers this spring, and that smaller facilities align with their mission to create safe, therapeutic, rehabilitative environments. DCYF believes this move toward smaller facilities is the right path forward in light of benefits seen from similar decisions made in other states, according to Krutsinger.

According to [The Marshall Project](#), California, Texas and Missouri are among the states that have begun moving away from large youth prisons and opting for smaller facilities in recent years.

The Pierce County facility is the only such facility that has gotten the green light in Washington, according to Gutierrez. It was recently authorized by Gov. Jay Inslee, Executive Director of Communications Jaime Smith from the Office of the Governor confirmed via email.

Krutsinger said the governor’s authorization is significant because the project will require additional spending beyond what was approved in the last budget cycle.

According to the press release about the transfers of youth from Green Hill to the Department of Corrections, DCYF is preparing proposals for the 2025 legislative session to improve implementation of the [JR to 25 law](#), which allows young people to stay in the juvenile rehabilitation system until age 25. These proposals could include smaller, medium-security facilities like the one slated for Pierce County as well as other investments in programming and staffing.



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