

# WA transfers 43 men from adult prison back to juvenile detention

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Green Hill School is a juvenile detention facility located in Chehalis. (Thomas James Hurst / The Seattle Times)

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Washington's Department of Children, Youth and Families began transferring 43 young men out of an adult prison back to a juvenile detention center Friday, following an order by a Thurston County Superior Court judge.

"DCYF has complied with the court order and has begun the intake process at Green Hill School," department spokesperson Nancy Gutierrez said in a statement.

Judge Anne Egeler in her July 19 order [set Friday as the deadline](#) for DCYF to return the men to its facilities.

On July 12, the department announced it had [transferred 43 young men](#), ages 21 to 25, from Green Hill School in Chehalis to the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton, Mason County, without prior notice because of safety concerns related to a "rapidly growing population."

Under state law passed in 2018, people who receive adult sentences but committed crimes when they were younger than 18 may serve their sentence in DCYF facilities until they turn 25.

The transfer of the 43 young men was preceded by the department's decision earlier in July to [suspend intakes](#) at two of its youth detention centers — Green Hill School and Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie — because of overcrowding and staffing shortages.

Officials at Green Hill School reported residents physically fighting staff members, garbage strewn around and broken room windows, with the facility's population about 30% above capacity.

The suspension of intakes is still in effect.

But Egeler had ruled that transferring the 43 young men without due process protections violated a settlement agreement reached less than a year ago with several Green Hill residents.

That legal settlement agreement requires those under DCYF custody receive [seven days' notice of the transfer, a hearing](#) and access to an attorney before being transferred to an adult facility.

In a court filing, DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter [said he believed telling residents in advance](#) they would be moved was "too dangerous to pursue" because of the risk of a prison riot.

Law enforcement groups, juvenile advocates and some elected officials have argued the state should have anticipated overcrowding at its facilities.

Attorneys for the department struggled to fight their case that transferring the men back to Green Hill School would risk the safety of everyone at the facility.

DCYF Secretary Ross Hunter did not respond to requests for an interview but [wrote in an opinion piece](#) for The Seattle Times that the team is "back to square one."

Hunter wrote that the overcrowding will result in more fights, assaults on staff, property damage and riots, halting rehabilitation and recreation. He wrote the department was already working on ways to "serve more young people" including opening a new unit at Green Hill.

According to Hunter, Green Hill's capacity is 180 people. In January 2023, Green Hill held 150 young men. By July 2024, the population reached 240, and Friday transfers will bring the population to 228.

Columbia Legal Services, the legal aid group that represented Green Hill residents in their 2022 lawsuit, wrote in a court motion that the 43 men "should not be held responsible for shouldering the consequences of a state agency's shortcomings."

In court filings, Hunter wrote the overcrowding at Green Hill had become “untenable,” with one staff member being hospitalized due to violence among residents.

In May, the King County Department of Public Defense filed a personal restraint petition on behalf of several Green Hill School residents that said the staffing shortages and routine punishment in the facility had led to “unconstitutionally cruel” and illegal conditions of confinement. The petition stated the boys and men were sometimes locked in their rooms all day, and staff often didn’t let them out to use the toilet or made them wait hours.

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