The background of the entire page is filled with diagonal, hand-painted brown brushstrokes of varying lengths and thicknesses. Overlaid on this background are several large, bold, black calligraphic characters. The characters 'S', 'X', 'O', and 'W' are clearly visible, arranged in a roughly vertical sequence from top to bottom on the right side of the page. The 'S' is at the top, followed by 'X', 'O', and 'W' at the bottom. The brushstrokes are a warm, earthy brown color, and the calligraphic characters are a solid, dark black.

Caged Birds Sing

**A Report by
Girls on the
A Unit
at...**

PREFACE

The voices in this report are those of the girls on the A Unit at the Thomas J. S. Waxter Children’s Center in Laurel, Maryland. This report, which describes the girls’ experiences in the juvenile justice system, grew out of an advocacy workshop I conduct with them on behalf of the ACLU of Maryland.

Waxter is unique in the Maryland juvenile justice system because it is the only secure facility exclusively for girls and because it is the only facility that houses children both before and after they have been through the court system. There are three housing units at Waxter: A, B, and C, which each house a different group of girls. Girls who have not yet been to court are held in detention on B unit. Girls who have been to court but who are awaiting placement are on C unit. The A Unit houses girls who, in the lingo of the juvenile justice system, are “committed” to Waxter for “treatment” after being through the court system. And, certainly, the state’s intention is to provide treatment. But the reality, from the girls’ perspective, seems to be something quite different. That perspective, unfortunately, is something that is too often overlooked.

In our workshops, the girls and I talk about the issues that concern them, and we try to identify ways the girls themselves can act directly to effect change. It should be no surprise that the issues about which the girls have been most vocal are their experiences in the juvenile justice system and the experience of being taken into custody by the state. Prior to this report, the girls used our advocacy sessions to prepare testimony on the experience of youth homelessness that was presented to the Baltimore City Council, to request regular meetings with the Waxter superintendent, and to write a letter to the editors at *The Baltimore Sun* responding to an article about Waxter.

We don’t often hear from incarcerated children in a public way. I want to thank the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) for agreeing to open Waxter to these workshops. DJS, the Secretary’s office, and the Waxter superintendent and staff should be credited for recognizing how important it is to give girls a voice — even when that voice is critical of DJS or other child-serving agencies. I think the temptation, in most cases, is to find ways to silence those voices, but, as far as I am aware, that has not happened here, and I am hopeful that that openness will continue as the advocacy workshops continue. We all want the same thing: to make sure we are doing the best we can for these girls, and we won’t get there without honest assessments from the girls about their perspectives on what we’re getting right and what we’re getting wrong. The next step, of course, is making sure we act on what we learn from them.

With respect to the mechanics of drafting this report, I cannot stress enough how completely this report is that of the girls themselves. They developed its contents over the course of several sessions in the fall of 2009. In these sessions, the girls talked and I took notes on an easel at the front of the room, usually word-for-word. Sometimes, they wrote private or anonymous comments. I simply typed up their comments and strung them together, making minor changes or additions for tone, clarity and consistency only when necessary. Some comments were so powerful that they stand alone — they are scattered throughout the report, in quotes. The report is also illustrated with the girls' artwork.

It is unfortunate that, because of legal and other concerns, the girls cannot yet stand up as individuals to take credit for this work. Each girl — you know who you are — added something special and different to the voice that carries through the report.

March 11, 2010

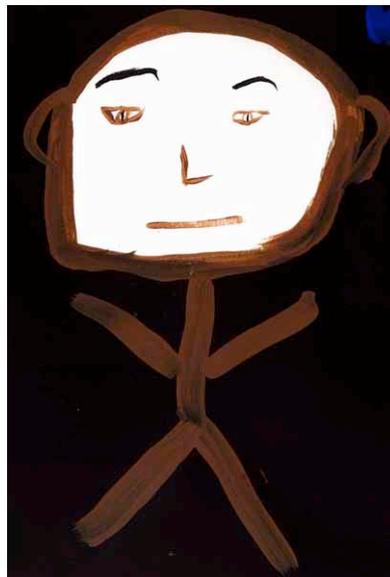
Sonia Kumar
Yale Law School Liman Fellow
ACLU of Maryland

Special thanks to the Arthur Liman Public Interest Program for its sponsorship

INTRODUCTION

This report is by young women locked up at the Waxter facility in Laurel, Maryland. We have spent the last few months talking — among ourselves and with the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland — about what we see around us. We think the people in charge should hear what we have to say about our lives, how we got involved with the juvenile justice system, and how the system—and all the other adults in charge — can do better by us. We have very specific ideas about what you — the adults in power, judges, courts, probation officers, the Secretary, DJS, child advocates, staff, and anyone who is interested — can do to make sure we are treated properly under the law, and not made to feel trapped and lost in a system that is supposed to be helping us. We hope you will take our recommendations seriously.

In this report, we describe our frustrations with Maryland’s juvenile justice system, but we also want to thank the people who we see trying their best to make a difference in our lives. For example, we really appreciate the staff members who make an effort to get to know us and who are there for us when we need to talk through our problems. We also appreciate the support we get from each other when things are rough, and from the family members who are here for us no matter what happens.



WHO WE ARE



We are teenagers — mostly between the ages of 15 and 18. We are young ladies. Citizens. We come from all over the state. We have different needs than the boys in DJS. We need space. We also need personal things.

We describe ourselves as unique, random, funny, emotional. We enjoy everything from basketball and chilling with friends to computers and music. One of us plays the drums. Another, the flute.

We have dreams, goals, and aspirations. We want to be child advocates. Pediatricians. Businesswomen. Computer techs. And maybe even a basketball player for the WBA.

We often feel that we don't have the chance to tell our side of the story — it seems that no one wants to hear what we have to say about what we did or did not do wrong and why, and what we need. The reports they give to the judges make us sound terrible. We are more than just the mistakes we have made. People look at us like we're really bad children and our parents didn't do anything to teach us right from wrong. Some people are scared of locked-up juveniles.

We want you to know who we are because we feel that the adults and systems making decisions about us — courts, judges, DJS, probation officers — are not getting to know us first. And that leads to bad outcomes for everyone. When you make assumptions about us, we don't get services that suit us, or placements that make sense. If you get to know us you will realize that you are locking up people — children, teenagers, girls — who can be safely placed in their communities.

Myself (by J.)

*I say I love you
But I barely love myself*

*I say I hate you
But I only hate myself*

*I say I miss my child
But I barely miss myself*

*I say I care about you
But I barely care about myself*

*I'm not saying I don't love you
I just don't love myself*

*I hate me. I hate my family
So I could try to love you*

*I want to love you forever through
thick and thin
Till death do us part.*

*But I have to learn to love myself first.
You say you're going to love me. But
how long will your love last?*

*I miss loving myself and having
myself.*

*I want to love myself, and cherish
myself*

*But where am I to go when I have just
myself.*



HOW WE GOT HERE

The Road to Waxter



We feel that there is not equal punishment for boys and girls in Maryland. It seems like, for the exact same charge, boys go home, but girls are locked up. Girls are held to a different standard — we're supposed to be the role models. It doesn't make any sense. Girls should not be locked in a secure facility for being AWOL or for running away. There should be different types of placements for girls who run away — just like there are for boys.

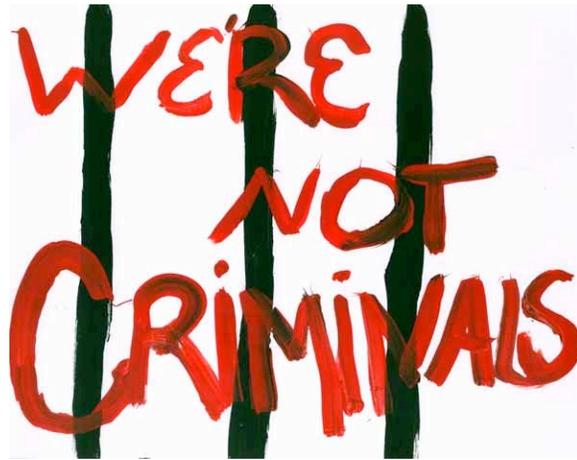
We have made mistakes, and we can accept responsibility for our mistakes. But that doesn't change the fact that some of us really don't belong here, in a secure facility. Waxter is supposed to be a place for girls with three major felonies, but Waxter has girls who don't meet that criteria.

When we look back at the mistakes we made, we see that we ourselves didn't understand what we were going through. We kept doing things that got us in trouble. Some of our mothers cried the first time we were locked up. For others, our moms didn't show up in court. For some, our families aren't there for us, or can't be there for us.

Some of us were placed at Waxter to try to keep us safe. Our judges got tired of us running, so they locked us up. But this is not the right place to deal with that, and that's not a legitimate reason for putting us behind bars. Some of us do need space and time to clear our heads out, but it can be done differently. In a way that doesn't make us feel like prisoners. Sometimes, we ran away because of abusive relationships at home. We had our reasons for running, but instead of dealing with those reasons, they decided to lock us up. If someone really made an effort to listen to our side of the story, we think they would be able to make decisions about our placements that made more sense. We think that adults would try to come up with more effective solutions if they stepped back and got a better understanding of why we left our placements and did something about that, instead of just deciding the answer is to lock us up.



“I think they need to stop locking us up because our famil[ies] don’t want us!”



“How am I a danger to my community if I ran away?”

We know that several of us, at least, are here not because we’re any real danger to anyone — except maybe ourselves. When we run away, when we go AWOL, we aren’t hurting anybody else, we aren’t threatening anyone else.

Many kids stuck in the DJS system are in the system because of family issues. It’s not fair to lock us up because our families don’t want us! Girls shouldn’t get trapped in the DJS system because of family problems.

Before we were in the committed program, most of us spent time on Waxter’s “Pending Placement” Unit (where girls who have already been adjudicated stay while waiting for the system to move them to their commitment). Why are girls sitting on that unit, getting no services, when there are empty beds here? Why are we doing so much dead time — time that we don’t get credit for? We count at least one full year of dead time served just by the seven girls on this unit. That’s thousands of dollars, lots of birthdays, lots of missed opportunities for girls to be working through the committed program. Let the girls in Pending Placement start the program, or at least get services.

Rescue Me (by T.)

***Take me away from this world
full of hatred.
Give my the oxygen to breathe
before I don’t make it.
Rescue my heart before the
beating stops.
Wipe away every single tear
before it drops.
Give me the confidence I need
to feel good about myself.
Help me even when I say I don’t need help.
Tell me all the things I do best,
Before it’s too late and I live
my life full of regrets.***



WHAT IT'S LIKE HERE

The building — our cage.



The Waxter building feels like a cage — not a place to help girls learn how to do better. The keys and locking system are too much work for the staff. We think it's dangerous. If there was an emergency, like a fire, we would be injured because the staff can't work the keys fast enough to let us out in time.

Waxter is an, old, ugly building that feels like it's falling apart. Picture cement blocks, layers of dirt and disease, all covered up with ugly-colored paint. Fencing. It's always too hot or too cold; the temperature is never right and never even — some rooms will be really warm and others so cold that we don't — and the staff don't — want to use them. Windows with thick screens, caked with dirt, that don't let sunlight in. There's a lot of metal. How are we supposed to focus on improving ourselves in a space that's all metal and concrete blocks? The building is way too small and the layout doesn't make sense. The girls from the detention unit have to walk through our unit to get to school, to medical, to their case managers, and to the cafeteria. That means that they are walking through our unit, disrupting what we're doing at least a dozen times a day! It's really distracting — it interrupts whatever we are doing. Imagine trying to have a serious conversation in a group and other girls and staff are suddenly walking through. Even worse, some of the girls have conflicts with each other, so it can create a risk of fighting.

Our rooms are small. They make us feel claustrophobic. They are hard. The mattresses are thin and hard. The beds are too small. There isn't natural light. The air doesn't circulate and we miss fresh air. There aren't bathrooms in our rooms, so we have to ask permission to go to the bathroom. The staff bathroom on our unit often gets stopped up and the smell of sewage spreads onto the entire unit. It's disgusting.

What DJS has said about Waxter...

"It's important for girls that what you say about them is mirrored in where you treat them, and so the physical facilities should be as progressive as the manner of the kind of treatment (that you give them),' [...] 'And at Waxter, when you walk into the facility, it sort of doesn't strike you like that. It strikes you like something between a hospital and a jail. That's the way it feels to me.'"

– DJS Secretary Donald DeVore, quoted in *The Capital*, Dec. 26, 2009

"The windows are detention grade, with stainless steel security frames and screens, and an enclosed cage on the outside. Suicide resistant beds are currently in unit C and will be installed in units A and B. The configuration of the building, specifically, the housing units do not allow efficient sightlines for supervision of youth. The somatic health space, consisting of a very small examination room, is seriously inadequate. ... The building suffers from deferred maintenance in many areas. The detention females from Unit C must pass through Unit A, which houses youth committed for treatment, in order to access common areas such as education, recreation, visitation, health services, and dining. This violates the legal requirements for sight and sound separation between the detention and treatment programs. Furthermore, the modular school facilities are temporary and do not have sufficient space for the education program to be offered by MSDE."

– Description of Waxter in DJS Facility Master Plan at 145.

"A qualitative examination of the Waxter Center ... reveals that conditions there are unsuitable for serving Maryland Youth."

– DJS Gap Analysis Addendum 2009 at 45.

"There really isn't (a timeframe to replace Waxter), not right now,' ... 'My guess is ... we could be anywhere from eight to 10 years away from seeing a new Waxter facility, and that in my mind, is not really acceptable,'"

– DJS Secretary Donald DeVore, quoted in *The Capital*, Dec. 26, 2009.

Staff

There are not enough staff for Waxter, especially on the committed unit. That has a real impact on how things work, or don't work. When there's only one staff member on our unit, we can't do the things we are supposed to be doing — we can't do what's posted on the schedule, and the activities that are supposed to be part of the Waxter program. Everything is slowed down when there's not enough staff.

Also, some of the staff in this facility do not seem to understand the rules they are supposed to be following and enforcing, which creates problems and inconsistencies for everyone. Sometimes staff call us names or favor others, and some staff have problems with girls who are gay. We also have problems with things for our unit disappearing — like movies and games — almost as soon as they are brought to the unit.

Some staff are really caring and help us talk through our problems and make us laugh. But they could do even more for us if there were other staff here to help them.

Medical

The space for medical is very cramped. The medical office needs much more space. More importantly, the medical office is really disorganized about important and serious stuff. For one thing, they always leave private information from your file where other residents can see it—they're not careful about protecting your privacy. They also make simple mistakes even with pretty serious tests, which can mean you don't get the right treatment unless you ask them to re-do the test and they agree.

It can take months to get an appointment for the dentist or for the eye doctor. When you see the nurse it's hard to tell if they're taking you seriously enough or not. The nurses should see you first and decide whether you need to see a doctor but instead they just put you on the doctor's list, which means you have to wait even if it's something they could probably take care of.

School

We probably aren't on going to be at the same level as other kids in our classes when we go back to school because of the problems with the school at Waxter.

We're coming in at all different levels but they put us in the same classroom. So if they are teaching to the more advanced student, the other girls can't follow, and then the teachers are frustrated. It doesn't make sense to take girls who are on different educational levels and teach them as if they're all the same level.

We are not learning new things at school. We don't get science. It's not hands-on or interesting. We feel like we're getting a fourth-grade education. The teachers don't always know what they're doing. Also, they sometimes take their anger with the facility out on us — like when they have to pack up their things to come to teach on the unit, instead of us going to them.

The classrooms are very small trailers that are dilapidated and falling apart.

We miss our families



Official visitation hours for our unit (the secure unit — the girls who live here for months) are only twice a week, for an hour on Thursday nights and an hour in the afternoon on Saturdays. It used to be four hours, (which was better, but still not enough) but they changed it, we think because they didn't want the girls on the different units mixing.

It is already really difficult for our families to come visit us. They have to have a car or get a ride because there's no other way to get here. It's far from many of them — an hour and a half each way. It's hard to convince them to travel for three hours to see us for one hour. We are kids. We need time with our families.

we miss talking to our mothers...having family there to comfort us when things go wrong...going to bingo with grandma...playing with the dogs...watching movies with the family...taking a niece out on a walk...the sound of mom calling upstairs to wake us up in the morning for school...

At least the girls who have been in the program longer, and who have earned privileges, can go home sometimes on a home pass. (Although we also think that you should be able to go on a home pass every weekend. It used to be that way, but earlier this year they changed it so that instead of being able to go home every weekend you could only go home every other weekend.) But for the girls who are just starting up the program, it's really hard. They can't go home.

We also don't get very much time to speak with our families. We get two phone calls a week, for 10 minutes, to people on our list (which have to be family members). There is a pay phone on our unit, where we can make calls in our free time, but the rates are extremely high, whether we are making collect calls or using a calling card. That makes it too expensive for us to keep in touch with our families.

For some of us, the separation may be better than for others. For some of us, it's good to be away from our community because we need space to cool down and start thinking clearly, away from bad influences. For others, it's more important to be at home — we think we could just be at home with extra services and supervision. We think it would be a good idea for judges and DJS to give us a say — give us a voice in making that decision.

The program

“It’s like a daycare center.”

We have some pretty big problems with the program. First of all, the schedule doesn’t match the program — so it will say we’re doing one thing when we’re doing another or doing nothing at all.

The Waxter program is around six months because of the time it takes to complete each level. We feel that some of us don’t need to be here for that long and that maybe there are too many levels. Some of us are too upset about being separated from our families to be able to get anything good out of the program.



Although we like the idea of having a community service component for each level, we think it’s unfair to have the hours required start over at every level, especially because it is so difficult for us to find activities to actually get community service hours. There’s only so much we can do in the facility, and we are not allowed out in the community. Maybe there is a better way to structure this part of the program so that we can serve our community service hours in the community.

We also are required to participate in group or lose points, but group usually isn’t helpful. We would have less of a problem with group if we felt that the staff knew what the groups are supposed to be and how to run them. Sometimes, it feels like we are the ones explaining to staff how the group is supposed to work.

Also, group doesn’t work for everyone, because some of us don’t want to share our private business with everybody. We would do better with one-on-one sessions with people who have been through what we are going through. We need a person that we can talk to, someone who has been through what we have gone through, and that we know will be there for us even after we leave.

We never get to have church. The other units get it every Sunday, but we don’t, and we don’t really understand why. We miss church.

It’s also hard for us because we see that when boys need help they get it. There are opportunities for them. When you look on the DJS website, all you see is boys, boys, boys. Boys building something, winning something in a contest, boys in a new program. No girls. At Cheltenham there’s a woodshop that’s part of the regular school program, they get to use it daily. They started something similar at Waxter, just on weekends, but they haven’t been back in months.

“I think we deserve just as much as the boys. Boys are not more important than us. We need to be treated equally.”

Being heard

In general, it feels like no one tells us what is going on. We are always the last to know about changes. Shouldn't we get some say in changes, since we are the ones who live here? We are really glad that Superintendent McNair has agreed to meet with us every other week to discuss concerns that we have on the unit. We think that this small change will have a big impact on resolving problems.

The grievance process is too slow. By the time we meet with the advocates who respond to our grievances, it's often too late to do something. They aren't here every day. For example, if there's an SBR (student behavioral report) that's negative, you lose points and privileges for that week — so if the problem isn't resolved quickly, you lose privileges unnecessarily even if you haven't done something wrong. Or, if we need a certain number of points to move to the next level in the program, but we lost points and have grieved losing those points, if the problem isn't resolved quickly, we have to wait until the next review — several weeks — before we get our points back and move to the next level. That means that we spend extra time on a level even after we've done everything right to move to the next level.

Our mail often sits around for days whether it's incoming or outgoing. Sometimes, the mail is put in the wrong staff person's box, which results in it getting lost or delayed even more. Sometimes they label things as gang-related even when they aren't. We should also be able to make phone calls at times other than lunch — the people we are trying to reach, like our probation officers, are never at their desks at lunch, so it's really a bad time to make calls.



Missing the basics

In the cafeteria, there's old food dried onto the walls and ceiling. The tables have been urinated on. Ants get under our clothes and bite us. (There are also jumping spiders and other bugs.)

The food...well, it's horrible. Freezer-burned, spoiled, and it's not uncommon to find something in it, like hair or, in the case of one girl, a piece of a wire brillo pad. Some of us feel like we don't get enough to eat.

We need shoes that don't fall apart after five minutes. Clothes that fit. Underwear and bras that fit — and, for some of us, that means we also need boxers. For some of us, the only underwear we have that fits is underwear that we got our parents to send us. That's not right.

A few words from the girls on the detention unit...

There are currently about 16 girls in the detention unit, the B unit, at Waxter. For the most part, we are girls who have not gone to court yet. We're waiting to go to court. Most of us are young women of color. Most of us are from Baltimore City. We're not here for as long as the girls on the committed unit, but some of us have been here for as long as two months. That's a long time to be in an unstructured program.

We have a lot of ideas about how Waxter could be improved to make a difference in the lives of the girls who are here, even for shorter periods of time. This is supposed to be a place for us to learn how to act better, to improve our lives and stay out of trouble. But it's not structured enough. It's like a daycare center. Basically, all that we do is eat, sleep, go to school and have a mental health group. And maybe watch some TV. As far as school, it's not on our level — everybody is in all different grades, but we all get the same work. We get graded and everything, but it's like an easy way out, we're not learning anything. They should be helping us learn how to cope and not make the same mistakes again. There should be speakers who've been through stuff like what we're going through and have gone through. Groups would be more interesting if we had people who had been through Waxter or places like Waxter and gotten themselves straight leading the group.

We also think that the facility doesn't have enough space to offer us the types of programs and services that we need. There should be a medical unit, like an infirmary, so girls don't have to stay in their rooms by themselves when they get sick. There should be an exercise room with exercise equipment, just like the boys have at Hickey. Right now, the place we sweat — where we do recreation — is the same place we eat: our cafeteria. That's unclean. Also, we need more supplies for maintenance, like cleaning supplies for the bathroom, brushes for the shower, and toilet brushes.

Finally, we think there are better ways to work with us before we even get to Waxter. For example, we think that there should be an evening reporting center for girls in Baltimore City, instead of having evening reporting centers only for boys. There should be shelters for girls whose families can't or won't let them come home. Also, most of us have left other placements, and that seems to be how we end up in a secure facility. But sometimes the place they put you in is not a good fit for you — for example, how are you going to put a black girl from Baltimore City in an all-white group home in Cumberland? If that is why we left the other placement, maybe we should get another chance.

We also think that, in some cases, they are quick to put you out of the group homes, for petty reasons. As soon as you mess up, you're out. Sometimes the reasons they put you out are not legitimate. They have to understand that we have lives from before, lives outside. They seem to want us to suddenly stop having those lives. Sometimes, we run because we want to go home. Sometimes, we run because we're worked up about a boy. We think we should get more chances before we get an out-of-home placement or locked up at Waxter. In some cases, we feel that our judges do try to listen to us, to hear what we think we need. But sometimes, a lot of times, we feel that our probation officers don't hear — or don't want to hear — what we're saying. They give up on us too quick.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations

1. DJS needs to STOP, look at the big picture. People are getting broken down, end up worse off than they were before they got here. It's disruptive to their lives.
2. DJS needs to change its outlook about where it's placing people and why.
3. Programs need to be better-suited to the kids they're supposed to serve.
4. The system needs to just let some people go and help them learn how to live in their communities instead of locking them up.

Recommendations about how you handle girls

1. Develop better ways of getting to know us, our families, what we're going through, and what we need.
2. Listen to us. Let kids have a say in whether they go back to their community or are sent away. Some of us may need some time away to break out of bad habits and influences, but some of us really need to stay at home.
3. When you put girls in placements, think about whether those placements fit the girl and whether it makes sense to put her there.
4. Give girls more chances to work through problems at group homes before putting them out. Consider taking us back when we run away instead of putting us in Waxter.
5. Give girls the same types of opportunities you give boys, like hands-on experiences and different types of job training programs.
6. Move the committed girls to a cottage or something that feels more like a home; our own space that is clean and where we won't get sick.
7. Or, instead of moving us to another facility, just close the committed program and stop locking us up. Put us in group homes in our communities, or at home with extra services, or other places that can help us.
8. Create a place just for runaway girls that is more like a home — like a fenced-in group home, or a cottage far from the highways, so there's no place to run.
9. Create an evening reporting center for girls in Baltimore City, as an alternative to detention.
10. Talk to us even when you're not talking to us about something we did wrong. Don't wait until we do something wrong to let us hear from you.

Recommendations for specific things to change at Waxter

The building

1. The spaces we live in should be more homey so we can focus on getting better. Even small things, like adding colorful curtains, can make a big difference.
2. The field should be cut down. Build something on it for us. Add some places to sit. Why do we have to chain down the picnic tables?
3. Make the medical space larger/less cramped and add an infirmary so sick girls don't have to stay in their rooms.
4. Add a space just for recreation that includes exercise equipment, like what the boys have at their facilities, so we can stay in shape.
5. DJS should have at least one person from headquarters with an office here, in Waxter.
6. Hire more staff and make sure that the staff you have get good training/know the rules, and treat us respectfully.

The programming

1. Find people who can come talk to us in groups and one-on-one who have been through the kinds of things we have been through and are going through.
2. We should be allowed to read books that are modern, about people like us, about young people. We can learn from good books, read about someone like us who made it, and we can learn how to follow in their footsteps, try to do like they did.
3. Make sure the groups we have are done properly, and have groups that fit better with what we need. Add more individual counseling to go with group.
4. Make sure that girls who want church or other religious services can get them.
5. Provide us with a mentor who stays in touch with us even after we leave.
6. Improve school by making sure the work we are given fits our level and make the classroom more hands-on so we feel interested.
7. Make sure we have vocational training, job training that is hands-on.
8. Since the program requires us to do community service, help us find ways to do service hours out in the community, and set up opportunities for us instead of just having us try to get hours by cleaning in Waxter or helping staff.

How the facility is operated

1. Make visitation hours longer and more frequent.
2. Make the child advocates come in every day or have a quick way to handle grievances that are time-sensitive.
3. Make sure mail goes in the right box and have a system to make sure we get it as soon as it arrives and it is sent as soon as it is ready.
4. Allow us time to make calls other than lunch time so we can reach people who are usually away on their lunch break.
5. Give us more than two 10-minute calls per week to speak with our families; and change the unit phone so we don't have to pay high fees to call home.
6. Keep talking to us about what we need at Waxter.
7. Make sure each girl has bras and underwear that fit her.
8. Make sure there are enough cleaning supplies to keep the bathrooms clean, like shower and toilet brushes.
9. Make sure medical staff protects our privacy and doesn't leave our files out for others to see.
10. Make sure that the nurses do not make girls wait to see the doctor if it is a problem the nurse can deal with.
11. Make sure our outside appointments, like the dentist or the doctor, are scheduled and kept.
12. Develop programming for the girls on the detention unit.
13. Allow girls in pending placement to just start the Waxter program or get services.





TAKE ACTION!

There are many ways you can help improve the situation of girls in the juvenile justice system and at Waxter specifically:

- ❖ Contact the ACLU's juvenile justice project at kumar@aclu-md.org or 410-889-8555 to report a problem, share your experience, or to find out about supporting or becoming involved with our work on behalf of girls in Maryland. We are especially interested in hearing from girls and women and the families of girls and women who are or have been involved in the juvenile justice system.
- ❖ Join the Waxter advisory board, which serves as a resource for connecting the community to the facility and for improving conditions and programs at Waxter. (You will need to submit a cover letter and resume to the Facility Advisory Board Coordinator by emailing CothranL@djs.state.md.us, faxing to (410) 333-4199, or mailing to the Department of Juvenile Services, 120 West Fayette Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.)
- ❖ Volunteer or intern with DJS to teach a class, provide a service, or serve as a mentor to girls in DJS facilities and programs. Get more information about these opportunities at http://www.djs.state.md.us/get_involved.html, or by contacting Melissa Alarcon, Community Services Coordinator, Community and Family Partnerships Office at 410-230-3132 or AlarconM@djs.state.md.us.
- ❖ Apply to join the State Advisory Board, which advises the DJS Secretary. The board has seven slots for members of the public, three of which are reserved for individuals under the age of 25. Members are appointed by the Governor. To apply, send a resume and cover letter to the Governor's Secretary of Appointments, by emailing to appointments@gov.state.md.us, faxing to (410) 974-2456, or mailing to Jeffrey Building, 5th floor, 16 Francis St., Annapolis, MD 21401.
- ❖ Write, email or call DJS Headquarters, the Governor, and/or your legislators to let them know you care about what Maryland is doing for girls in the juvenile justice system. You can find a sample letter at www.aclu-md.org.
- ❖ If you have concerns or information to share about problems in a facility, contact the Independent Monitor assigned to that facility (their contact information is at <http://www.oag.state.md.us/JJMU/index.htm>), as well as DJS's Inspector General unit (call DJS's central office at 443-263-8831 to find out how to report your concerns to the Inspector General's office).

For regular updates on the ACLU's work on behalf of girls in Maryland's juvenile justice system, please visit our website:
www.aclu-md.org.

