



Trans Youth in NY Juvie Now Treated According to Gender ID

by Kilian Melloy
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Some youth advocates worry that jailing juveniles for comparatively minor infractions will only lead to them picking up more serious criminal traits. But in a reversal, New York State juvenile detention workers are now expected to learn a thing or two about sensitivity and acceptance.

A June 20 Associated Press article details how transgendered kids in juvenile lockup can now request to be called by names and pronouns appropriate to the gender they feel themselves to be, regardless of their physical anatomy.

Transgendered youths in New York's juvenile detention system are also allowed to select which gender-appropriate uniform they will wear, including underclothes, and to shower, shave, and groom in a way respectful of their gender convictions.

The new rules resulted from a suit brought by a young woman who claimed that while in a detention facility she was deprived of her feminizing hormones, which she had been taking for several years.

Having been born male, she was prescribed the hormones, but said that detention center authorities took them away and refused to call her by her chosen name, calling her by the male birth name instead.

The young woman's case was settled for \$25,000 and an agreement that policies for handling transgendered youths would be rewritten.

Equality advocates praised the move, with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's spokesperson Roberta Sklar, saying, "New York is way ahead of the curve," the AP article reported.

Continued Sklar, "When you have a system like the New York Office of Children and Family Services putting out a clear nondiscrimination policy, it should be seen as a model for similar kinds of agencies all over the country."

New York joins just a few other states, including California and Hawaii, that have taken steps to address the needs of transgendered youths in juvenile detention, the AP story reported Susan Hazeldean as saying.

Hazeldean, who serves as director for Urban Justice Center's Peter Cicchino Youth Project, said, "What we were concerned about is that LGBT young people are entering these programs facing a lot of hostility and violence, and coming out more traumatized and more damaged than when they went in."

Indeed, in a report from 2001, the Urban Justice Center found that GLBT youth who were put into

juvenile detention were subjected to harassment, violent mistreatment, and discrimination.

Said Hazeldean, "We think this policy is going to make a real difference."

But the workers charged with learning and abiding by the new rules are not as welcoming to the changes.

As reported by the New York Daily News, two unnamed detention facility workers who spoke with the tabloid offered sharp criticism.

Said one, "People are appalled."

Added the first employee, "The vast majority of kids in here don't fit the category and want nothing to do with this."

Authorities reportedly estimate that the state of New York has about 20-30 transgendered youth in their juvenile detention system.

The other worker expressed the opinion that introducing changes gradually would have made things easier.

Said the second worker, "I'm dealing with predominantly inner-city kids from gang neighborhoods; there's a lot of other battles and issues I need to deal with."