



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Youth Services

**DYS INTERIM RESIDENTIAL RELEASE
PLANNING ADVISORY**

This advisory is issued to respond to the emergent issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic that may impact DYS's Release Planning Process. This advisory is intended to be time limited and will be reviewed two weeks from the effective date. This advisory was issued given the current best practices for containment of COVID-19 issued by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control. DYS reserves the right to rescind or modify this guidance at any time if it determines that the public health or health and safety of youth and staff are at risk, or to comply with state and federal guidance.

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 120, section 6, authorizes the Department of Youth Services (DYS) to, after an objective consideration of all available information, permit a youth liberty under supervision with conditions it believes conducive to law-abiding conduct.

In light of the public health issues attendant to the COVID-19 pandemic, DYS is conducting a review of all youth who are currently in their transitional period and has identified youth who are good candidates for accelerated community release.

These youth all have assigned caseworkers responsible for case planning and supervision, have approved living arrangements with family or otherwise approved and appropriate living situations, have demonstrated progress in their treatment program and are identified by their treatment teams as good candidates for return to the community. The youth placed in community based residential programs will have typically had 90-120 days of treatment services. The youth placed in longer-term facility based secure programs will have typically had 6 months to 2 years of treatment services. The duration of a youth's placement in a residential treatment program is based on a classification process that takes into account the severity of the offense committed by the youth, results of a comprehensive assessment,¹ and the progress made by the youth while in residential treatment.

Before these youth are returned to the community, their cases will have undergone the same comprehensive transition process that applies to every DYS youth who is being considered for community re-entry. That process formally begins 100 days prior to the projected release date. Formal treatment meetings take place at the 90, 60 and 30 day intervals prior to that projected date. If the youth is constructively engaged in addressing their risk areas and has maintained reasonable

¹ The comprehensive assessment consists of a comprehensive review of a youth's strengths, treatment needs, risk areas and history of offending behavior, mental status, medical and behavioral health history, developmental history, family relationships, functioning in and ties to the community, educational needs, history of compliance with probation or other supervised release, and history of compliance while detained pre-trial, where applicable, completed by regional clinical, medical, and educational staff, and a youth's caseworker.

compliance with the program expectations, DYS begins passes which allow the youth to attend appointments and access treatment related to their released plan in the community 60 to 30 days prior to release.

DYS believes the release of this cohort of youth makes sense in the urgent circumstances, allows them to return home, and will lower the census in our residential continuum. DYS will be working with the Committee for Public Counsel Services to arrange counsel for any youth who may need additional legal assistance during this time.