

washingtonexaminer.com



D.C. Turns to GPS to Monitor Young Criminals

By Freeman Klopott, Examiner Staff Writer

The District's juvenile justice agency is piloting a program that puts global positioning system devices on the ankles of the young criminals it releases into the community.

The program was started under Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services interim Director Robert Hildum, and seeks to keep better track of the agency's wards. This pressure has been on DYRS this year after nearly a dozen of its wards have been charged with murder and more than six have been slain. Hildum was appointed to the job in July by Mayor Adrian Fenty.

"Electronic monitoring is a 'tool' in the 'toolbox' for case managers," DYRS spokesman Reggie Sanders wrote in an e-mail. "It is not a panacea, but can be helpful to improve the oversight of young people in the community."

Sanders said the agency has contracted with Satellite Tracking of People LLC, the same company used by District's adult probation agency. DYRS, he said, is applying for grants that would help supply the funding needed to cover the costs that could range as high as \$12 per day for each device. He wouldn't say how many monitoring bracelets have been slapped on the ankles of DYRS wards, but sources said the program is running and about 200 bracelets have been purchased.

The monitoring system allows case managers to make sure their wards are attending school and treatment programs. It can also be used to enforce

house arrest. If a ward deviates from a prescribed schedule, or steps out of his home, the case manager is alerted via e-mail. It's not the first time the District has employed electronic monitoring, youth advocates said, but this program appears to be more advanced than previous iterations.

Over the past five years, DYRS has increasingly focused on putting its wards in residential rehabilitation programs, where officials have hoped proximity to family can help ease treatment.

Youth advocates like D.C. Lawyers for Youth's executive director, Daniel Okonkwo, support residential programs as a method of getting youth out of what they say is a toxic environment inside juvenile detention centers. Okonkwo said the electronic monitoring system could be beneficial if it's used to keep more kids out of the detention centers.

But "if they're taking kids who are already in the community and putting them a monitoring program, they'll further stigmatize them," he said.

Critics of the residential program model say it's too lax, and has led to the killings in which DYRS wards have been implicated.

Among them is police union chief Kris Baumann, who said, "If you think someone is violent enough that they need to be monitored, you just shouldn't let them out in public."

He added, "They're still not taking violent crime seriously."

