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DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES EARNS ACA ACCREDITATION HONORS

*Victor Cullen Center is the First Juvenile Facility in
Maryland to Receive National Accreditation*

Baltimore, MD – The Victor Cullen Center (VCC) in Sabillasville, MD has received national accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections. The all-boys committed hardware-secure campus is the first juvenile facility to receive national accreditation in the State of Maryland. Victor Cullen Center is now one of about 500 facilities nationwide to earn ACA accreditation.

“This is an incredible milestone for our entire agency,” said DJS Secretary Sam Abed. “It is important for us to follow national juvenile justice standards in our facilities and I am very proud of this accomplishment. The Victor Cullen staff and the many supporting departments worked tirelessly for over a year to make VCC a model program for the rest of the state.”

ACA standards are the national benchmark for the effective operation of correctional systems throughout the United States and are necessary to ensure that facilities are operated professionally. The ACA standards address services, programs and operations essential to good facility management, including administrative and fiscal controls, staff training and development, physical plant, safety and security, justice and order, medical, education, food service, human resources, rules and discipline, and community relations. Standards reflect practical, up-to-date policies and procedures that safeguard the life, health and safety of staff and youth.

On October 30, 2018, the ACA audit team spent three days at VCC reviewing hundreds of standards, as well as speaking to staff and youth. The facility met all 35 mandatory standards and all but two of the 310 non-mandatory standards, for a final compliance rating of 99.35%.

During the Audit Exit Meeting, Chairperson and Auditor Roger Chute from Tennessee said, “I don't know how to pay higher respect to you and the work that you do with the most difficult kids in the state at this facility. It's been a long time since I have visited a facility where everybody appears so upbeat.”

Preparation for the accreditation audit started in February 2017 under the leadership and guidance of DJS Deputy Secretary of Operations Linda McWilliams. Over the course of the next 18 months, DJS developed an accreditation plan, which involved support from various departments including maintenance, fiscal, human resources, research and data evaluation, policy and planning, medical, food service, behavior health, training, Attorney General's office, and the Maryland State Department of Education. In addition, the following tasks were completed:

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- Set up 371 standard compliance files with checklists and supporting documentation for the process indicators
- Participated in the on-site technical assistance audit
- 103 policies were re-written and/or established
- Updated facility youth handbook
- Completed revisions of the behavior management program manual to incorporate principles of the PBIS framework
- Physical plant upgrades: renovation of the dining hall, painting of living units and campus buildings, replaced locking system in living units
- Completed extensive programming and policy and procedure training for all staff

Auditor Steve Klein from Florida had the opportunity to speak with youth from Victor Cullen and remarked that, “one of the messages that came from most of the guys is they [the staff] care about us here. That says a whole lot that it's not just a job. It's not just about getting a paycheck or anything. You really care about what you're doing. It shows in how you prepared for this [audit] and how you treat the students.”

The Victor Cullen Center serves youth who have been ordered by the courts to receive treatment services in a secure environment. The treatment program serves male youth primarily between the ages of 14 and 18, and typically lasts four to six months although the treatment may be extended, if necessary. The facility provides dietary, medical, educational and counseling services, as well as space for recreation. In addition to receiving services, youth residing at VCC attend school in the facility year-round, five days a week for six hours a day.

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