**DJJ Winter Georgia Preparatory Academy Graduation Ceremonies Held**

**DECATUR, GA** - During the week of December 7, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) held graduation ceremonies around the state for youth attending the Georgia Preparatory Academy (GPA). Thirty-two high school diplomas, thirty GED diplomas, and one technical certificate of credit in Cosmetology were awarded at eleven DJJ facilities over six days. DJJ took measures to ensure all COVID-19 protocols were followed for the safety of staff, graduates, and their families.

DJJ is the 181st school district in Georgia. There is a middle and high school called Georgia Preparatory Academy and a GED program called Pathway to Success within the school system. Georgia Preparatory Academy and Pathway to Success are located at 28 campuses within DJJ’s Regional Youth Detention Centers, Youth Development Campuses, and Education Transition Centers across Georgia. DJJ operates the Georgia Preparatory Academy with a curriculum that meets the education standards set forth by the Georgia Department of Education for all public schools.

For the December 2020 GPA graduation, class leaders included the Valedictorian from the Atlanta YDC, the Salutatorian from the Eastman YDC, and the Highest Standing GED graduate from the DeKalb RYDC. Other DJJ facilities with GPA graduates included the Macon YDC, Augusta YDC, Muscogee YDC, Milledgeville YDC, Augusta RYDC, Metro RYDC, Rockdale RYDC, Gainesville RYDC, Martha K. Glaze RYDC, Terrell RYDC, Savannah RYDC, Claxton RYDC, Muscogee ETC, Chatham ETC, and Richmond ETC.

For the graduation ceremony held at the Rockdale RYDC, students and guests were treated to a keynote speech from Rockdale County Chief Magistrate Judge Phinia Aten. Judge Aten, who is a community partner at the facility, asked the important question of “in this chaotic and critical time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when young people all over the world are asking, ‘Is going through the rigors and effort to obtain an education still worth it? Can I still make a positive difference?’ These graduates have answered these questions for us all with a resounding YES. There are more circles in life than straight lines, but the most important things are to stay on the journey, build a good name for yourself and know that the power I am holding today will be yours tomorrow. So, I need you to be great. We are in this together.”

The Department of Juvenile Justice congratulates all recent youth graduates.

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**ABOUT DJJ**

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice is a multi-faceted agency that serves the state's youthful offenders up to 21 years of age. The Department's mission is to transform young lives by providing evidence-based rehabilitative treatment services and supervision, strengthening youth and families' well-being, and fostering safe communities.

* Video of the ceremony can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/FcnbSvR4KMc>