

- HOME
- BIOGRAPHY
- COLUMNS
- OPINION
- BOOKS
- ART
- PUBLICATIONS
- NEWS
- READER COMMENTS
- UGA ROOM
- EMAIL

You are here: [Home](#) / [Columns](#) / [2015 Columns](#) / January 26, 2014: Georgia's Juvenile Justice System Going to the Dogs and That's a Good Thing

January 26, 2014: Georgia's Juvenile Justice System Going to the Dogs and That's a Good Thing

02/02/2015 By [admin](#)

The State of Georgia's Juvenile Justice System is going to the dogs. And that's a good thing.

This is just one of the lessons I have learned during my short time as a member of the board of the Department of Juvenile Justice. All I knew about the department up until my appointment was what I had read about Gov. Nathan Deal's efforts to restructure Georgia's criminal justice system in his first term. Juvenile Justice was a part of that effort.

Why the powers-that-be thought I would add something to the process still remains a mystery to me. The board is chockablock with law enforcement officials, district attorneys, judges, child advocates and, oh yes, one modest and much-beloved columnist still trying to figure out the acronyms. (This place loves acronyms.)

Gov. Deal signed the Juvenile Justice Reform bill into law in May, 2013. It was and still is a great example of what happens when Democrats and Republicans put aside their ideological differences, tell special interest groups to butt out and work together to give our state something for which its citizens can be proud, instead of having to explain why we are last in the nation. In criminal justice reform, we are ahead of the pack.

Juveniles who have committed serious crimes and are a threat to public safety are incarcerated and dealt with appropriately. But there are also a lot of kids who can be considered low risk offenders; who made a bad decision and ended up in one of the department's detention centers and without the proper supervision may get out and make another bad one. For whatever reason they are there, the cost to Georgia taxpayers is \$90,000 per year per child.

As Gov. Deal said when he signed the bill, "Georgia could not afford its own numbers. Not when we have more than half of all youth offenders ending up back in a detention center or prison within three years. We found ways to keep low-risk offenders out of detention centers and save taxpayer dollars, nearly \$85 million over five years. We did all this while not only maintaining but improving public safety."

In short, it makes no sense to throw away the lives of all young juvenile offenders and make the rest of us pay for it. Find a way to give them structure, support, self-esteem, an education (The Department of Juvenile Justice has its own accredited public school system.) and some hope that they can become productive citizens.

That challenge falls directly on the shoulders of the 4,000 members of the department and its leader, Comm. Avery Miles, a dynamic and inspirational former Hall County prison warden who could motivate a tree stump to sing Amazing Grace. He has pushed his department to find new and innovative ways to positively impact the lives of young offenders. He reminds me of one of my favorite George Bernard Shaw quotes, "People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it." Which brings me to the dogs.

Chrissy Kaczynski, a nationally-known animal advocate before joining the department, runs a program called Rescue-2-Restore, where dogs that were scheduled to be euthanized are placed with selected young people who are then trained to teach the dogs skills that will make the animals more adoptable. It has been a great success for the dogs (so far all of them have been adopted) and for the young trainers. "It give the kids a purpose as well as teaching them patience and compassion," Kaczynski

MEET DICK YARBROUGH



Dick Yarbrough is a Southern philosopher, political pundit and straight-shooting humorist all rolled into one. Seen weekly in nearly one million households throughout Georgia, his column is an artful mix of comedy

and candor that leaves readers amused, inspired or enraged, but always engaged!

FIND DICK ON FACEBOOK, FOLLOW DICK ON TWITTER, SEND DICK AN EMAIL!



LATEST NEWS

May 2013: Dick Yarbrough Named One of Georgia's 'Power Brokers for 2013'

April 2013: News Flash From The Department Of Juvenile Justice

COLUMN ARCHIVES

Select Month ▼

CATEGORIES

Select Category ▼

says. "The kids tell me they look forward to the opportunity to work with the animals because 'the dogs don't judge us.'" (Proving once again why I like dogs better than a lot of people.)

The program has been rolled out in Dalton and Columbus and there are plans to bring the program into Atlanta, Gainesville and Macon and beyond. Who knows? Maybe one dog scheduled to die because nobody wanted it will end up in a good home and bring someone a lot of pleasure and companionship because it was well-trained. Maybe a youthful offender will discover the feeling of success and self-worth and can take that experience into the outside world and become a productive citizen. Then you and I won't have to pay our part of the \$90,000 tab required to keep them locked away and lost.

Now you see why the juvenile justice system is going to the dogs and we are all the better for it.

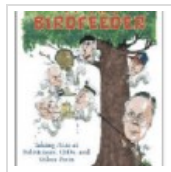
You can reach Dick Yarbrough at yarb2400@bellsouth.net; at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139; online at dickyarbrough.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/dickyarb

Filed Under: [2015 Columns](#), [Columns](#)

SPEAKING SCHEDULE

Dick is a sought-after speaker and speaks regularly to groups all around Atlanta and the Southeast. He is in high demand on the local as well as regional circuit. Some examples of local groups where he has appeared include businesses, Rotary Clubs, church groups, hospitals, Kiwanis Clubs, school districts, and many other organizations and events. If you ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

BOOKS



And They Call Them Games -- An Inside View of the 1996 Olympics (2002 Mercer University Press) 220 ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

WHAT DICK'S READERS ARE SAYING...

You are my hero -- I do believe that the late Lewis Grizzard, a fellow Jawja graduate, is speaking to you from the grave.

Maybe you should write more carefully, you thoughtless bigot. I'm training Fido right now to attack a cardboard cutout of you, so you better not walk by my neighborhood.

Thanks for a great column. I haven't laughed so hard in years.