



DOUGLAS COUNTY

# Consultant to study juvenile justice system

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Douglas County is bringing in a consultant to undertake a wide-ranging study of the county's juvenile justice system.

Tuesday, the Douglas County Board unanimously approved a \$674,000 contract with Boston-based FSG Consulting for a 10½-month study, plus up to \$62,000 in expenses.

County taxpayers will pick up one-fifth of the cost. The rest will be paid by the Sherwood Foundation, the Lozier Foundation, the Peter Kiewit Foundation and John Scott, vice president of the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation, who is making a personal pledge.

The goal is a comprehensive study of how young people in Douglas County end up in jail. Consultants will mine data

from schools, mental health programs, juvenile courts, diversion programs and other sources. They will interview local experts and citizens and develop a plan to help local agencies reduce the number of youth incarcerations.

In the firm's pitch letter, FSG Director Emily Malenfant cited an Annie E. Casey study that found Nebraska has one of the highest juvenile incarceration rates in the country.

"The time is ripe to develop a more coordinated and cohesive response to addressing the needs of juvenile offenders in Douglas County," she wrote.

The study follows passage of a state law that promotes treatment over prison for young offenders and expands the role of probation officers to oversee them. The bill was sponsored by State Sen. Brad Ashford of Omaha.

Ashford, who is now running for Congress, praised Douglas County leaders for taking the initiative.

The county also is considering a new approach to hiring lawyers who represent children in juvenile court proceedings.

FSG has led similar studies of juvenile justice systems, most notably in New York state. When the firm checked in a few years later, outcomes

were encouraging, with juvenile arrests down significantly with no loss to public safety, Val Bockstette, a managing director at FSG, said at an earlier board meeting.

In conducting preliminary interviews with stakeholders, Bockstette said, she heard a common refrain: "'We can do better.' We felt that urgency."

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*Emily Malenfant, director of FSG Consulting, in the firm's pitch letter for a 10½-month study of Douglas County's juvenile justice system*