

*Charting a New Course*  
*A Blueprint for Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State*

December 2009

A Report of Governor David Paterson's Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice

Report Summary

The Governor's Task Force members were charged with examining what happens to youth ages seven to 15 found guilty of a crime in the juvenile justice system. Task Force members focused their attention on those youth who were placed in the care and custody of the Office of Children and Family Services, particularly those placed in state-operated facilities. The 20 specific, wide-ranging recommendations in the report create a road map for continuing the reforms already underway by:

- reducing the number of institutional placements,
- improving treatment for those in care,
- increasing resources for community-based alternatives,
- eliminating inequities across the system,
- improving supports for youth, both in and released from, the system and
- increasing accountability.

The recommendations, once implemented, will result in a more effective approach for addressing the needs of youth in trouble and increasing public safety. The report firmly states that placement of youth should be the choice of last resort and used only for those situations when there is no other option for protecting the public. The report states that "institutionalizing young people who do not pose a risk to public safety is ineffective and unsafe."

The juvenile justice system exists to protect public safety and to rehabilitate youth in its care. Over time, the system has become more corrections-focused and punitive with less emphasis on helping youth turn their lives around by providing a nurturing, therapeutic environment. Many young people are sent to these facilities by judges "simply because there are no community-based alternatives available to address their concerns about a youth's family situation or provide specialized treatment services." These youth are in need of therapy, not punishment. While a few of the smaller facilities in the state have achieved a more supportive culture, the goal is to develop a unified system across the state that provides trauma-informed practice and treatment and realizes better outcomes for youth and communities.

The Task Force identified the following three goals for a reformed juvenile justice system and eight principles to serve as a foundation for a collective vision.

## Goals:

- Ensure Public Safety
- Hold youth accountable for their actions
- Produce positive outcomes for youth, families, and their communities

## Principles:

1. Embrace the strengths and inherent potential of every youth.
2. Recognize that youth are developmentally different from adults.
3. Capitalize on the positive connections between a young person and his or her family and community.
4. Reserve the use of institutional placement for youth who pose a significant risk to public safety.
5. Establish a flexible continuum of services and programs for youth and their families.
6. Ensure that all youth – those in institutional placement and those in community-based programs – are treated with dignity and respect in nurturing settings that emphasize a positive youth development approach.
7. Help youth transform their behaviors to become productive, law-abiding successful citizens.
8. Evaluate program performance to increase transparency and enhance effectiveness.

The results will yield a unified, cohesive system of care that places youth in the least restrictive setting possible. The results will also reduce the disproportionality and disparities that currently exist across the system. Cost savings - \$23,000 per participant for taxpayers and \$96,000 for taxpayers and victims over the long-term - will be realized by increasing the use of evidenced-based programs and treatments that are less expensive and lower recidivism rates.

The report is not meant to encompass all segments of the system and therefore does not address the age of criminal responsibility, policies and practices related to juvenile offenders, or arrest and detention policies and practices. These issues should be addressed as part of a more comprehensive juvenile justice agenda.

The report is available at <http://www.vera.org/download?file=2944/Charting-a-new-course-A-blueprint-for-transforming-juvenile-justice-in-New-York-State.pdf>