

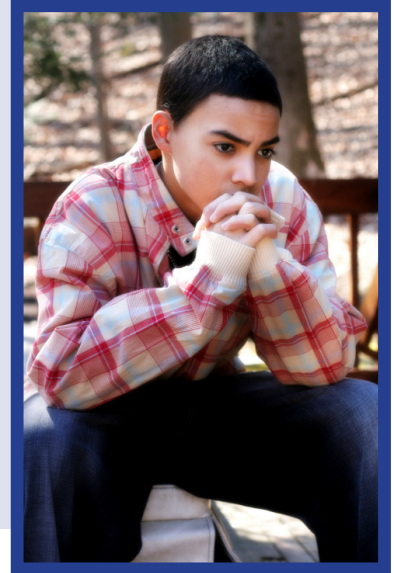
FactSheet

Juvenile Justice

Yearly, New York State places about 1,700 youth in juvenile justice facilities with the goals of keeping the public safe and rehabilitating youth. Unfortunately, neither of these goals is realized; 75% of youth are re-arrested within three years of release.

Many youth in the juvenile justice system were once involved in the child welfare system. A large percentage is in need of mental health and substance abuse treatment. A majority are non-violent. Many young people are sent to these facilities by judges because they are in need of specialized services that are not available in their communities. But youth who are placed in a residential facility often don't receive the rehabilitative services they need.

Two recent reports documenting the woeful conditions found in New York's state-operated juvenile justice facilities provide a sense of urgency to implement long overdue reforms. Keeping non-violent juveniles in their communities and providing adequate mental health and substance abuse treatment are two ways of improving outcomes for juveniles in the system.



Key Facts

- ▶ New York's statute defines the age of the juvenile justice system's jurisdiction from 7 years of age to 15.
- ▶ While 76% of the youth in custody are from the New York City area, most facilities are upstate, far from families and communities.
- ▶ In 2007, 53% of the youth in juvenile justice facilities were there for misdemeanor offenses ranging from shoplifting and graffiti to robbery without a weapon.
- ▶ 70% of the youth were assessed at entry as needing substance abuse treatment and 48% needed mental health services.
- ▶ More than 80% of those in placement are African-American or Latino. They represent only 44% of the youth population in the state.
- ▶ The state spends from \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually for each youth in a juvenile justice facility. Costs for alternative programs vary but may cost as little as \$5,000 per youth per year.

We Can Do Better

- ▶ Reforms are needed to transform the state-operated facilities from a corrections-based model to a therapeutic model, with adequate services for substance abuse and mental health treatment. The recommendations in *Charting a New Course, A Blueprint for Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State*, serve as a roadmap for change and should be implemented.
- ▶ More community-based alternatives to incarceration are needed that hold youth accountable for their offense, and help them turn their lives around with a combination of treatment, skills development, relationships and opportunities. Residential placements should be reserved for those situations in which a juvenile's own safety or the public's safety is at risk.
- ▶ Finally, the issue of raising the juvenile justice jurisdictional age should be discussed at the same time with other juvenile justice reforms. No 16- or 17-year-old should be treated as an adult in the correctional system. New York is one of only two states that has not raised its age.