

Keep kids, even those who make mistakes, safe.



Keeping the kids in the juvenile justice system safe and rehabilitating them while we hold youth accountable for their actions is more than just the right thing to do. It's also how we prevent future delinquency and crime.

The Texas youth justice system aims to increase public safety by getting the kids it works with to accept responsibility for their actions and plan for future success.¹ For that to happen, youth need quality services and supports and safe conditions while they're in the system. These kids will eventually leave the system, and incarceration alone won't improve their behavior. What will is providing age-appropriate specialized treatment, mental health and substance abuse treatments, and community-based services shown to bring about real, positive change by rehabilitating youth so that they don't reoffend.²

What to Know

- **Placing kids in small, homelike settings close to their communities has been shown to reduce recidivism.**³ It also increases safety and positive youth outcomes.⁴



- Texas has moved toward keeping more kids in their communities. In 2007, Texas had 5,000 kids scattered throughout the state in far-flung secure facilities. Reports began to surface of multiple instances of children being sexually and physically abused at the hands of state juvenile justice facility staff, which led policymakers to implement **reforms that limit the numbers of kids locked up and increase safety and transparency.** Reforms also focused on educational and reentry supports to secure better outcomes for kids once they leave facilities.
- Building on these reforms, changes to the law in 2011 created a new Texas Juvenile Justice Department in place of two earlier juvenile justice agencies. The law creating the new department also gave the department **responsibility for delinquency prevention and called for the agency to move towards the use of small juvenile justice facilities** that prioritize youth's treatment needs, providing meaningful rehabilitation in a therapeutic environment. Additionally, TJJD was charged with locating youth in or near their home community to help promote success.
- While changes in law are a critical step in ensuring youth in our juvenile justice system are safe, reports of **facility chaos and youth violence in 2012 show the need for adequate funding and accountability** in reform implementation.

How to Make it Happen

- **Prioritize delinquency prevention:** Texas needs to invest in prevention programs proven to keep kids on the right track and out of the juvenile justice system, while promoting collaboration among service providers.
- **Budget for success:** Texas needs to appropriately allocate resources so our community-based programs can deliver on their promise and so all communities have the resources to support kids close to home.
- **Ensure consistent, high-quality rehabilitative and diversion-focused programming** across all juvenile probation departments statewide.
- **Implement effective performance measures** at the county level to evaluate, compare, and improve program effectiveness.
- **Work with counties to ensure adequate funding at the county level** for proven, non-residential rehabilitative programs such as anger management programs, drug and alcohol counseling, and mental health programs.
- **Establish clear timelines** and provide careful, thoughtful planning for a successful transition to state secure facilities that are sized appropriately for effective rehabilitation.
- **Ensure training and effective oversight** for corrections officers, probation officers, and staff who interact with youth in the system, and make sure these folks have clear accountability for implementing a reform-oriented approach.

For more on this, see <http://tinyurl.com/MonitorReforms>

Thinking About Costs

Keeping youth closer to home isn't just better for youth and their families, it's also more cost effective for the state.

In 2010, the average cost of community-based supervision ranged from roughly \$18-\$40 per day, depending on how intensive the treatment.

The cost to hold youth in secure facilities at the county level that year averaged over \$169 per day, and the cost of keeping a youth in a state-secure facility was over \$359 per day.

Sources

"Thinking about Costs"

- Texas Legislative Budget Board. "Criminal Justice Uniform Cost Report Fiscal Years 2008 - 2010" January 2011. http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Public_Safety_Criminal_Justice/Uniform_Cost/Criminal%20Justice%20Uniform%20Cost%20Reports2008-2010.pdf

- 1 Texas Juvenile Justice Department Vision Statement. www.tjjd.texas.gov/aboutus/agencymission.aspx.
- 2 National Health Policy Forum. (2005). Mental Health and Juvenile Justice: Moving Toward More Effective Systems of Care. http://www.nhpf.org/library/issue-briefs/IB805_JuvJustice_07-22-05.pdf.
- 3 D. Donat, "Encouraging alternatives to seclusion, restraint, and reliance on PRN drugs in a public hospital." *Psychiatric Services*, (2005), 56(9), 1105-1108.
- 4 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders*, (Baltimore, MD, 2010), p. 2. http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Juvenile%20Detention%20Alternatives%20Initiative/MQModel/MQ_Fullreport_webfinal.pdf.

