

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

Date: March 29, 2021

## New Connecticut Poll Results On Youth Justice Reform

After a year of pandemic, protests, and political strife, America's divisions are clear, but a new survey reveals that reforming the youth justice system is an issue that brings Connecticut residents together across education and ideological lines. The vast majority of Connecticut residents supports a range of reforms to the youth justice system designed to fundamentally shift focus and resources to prevention and rehabilitation instead of punishment and incarceration.

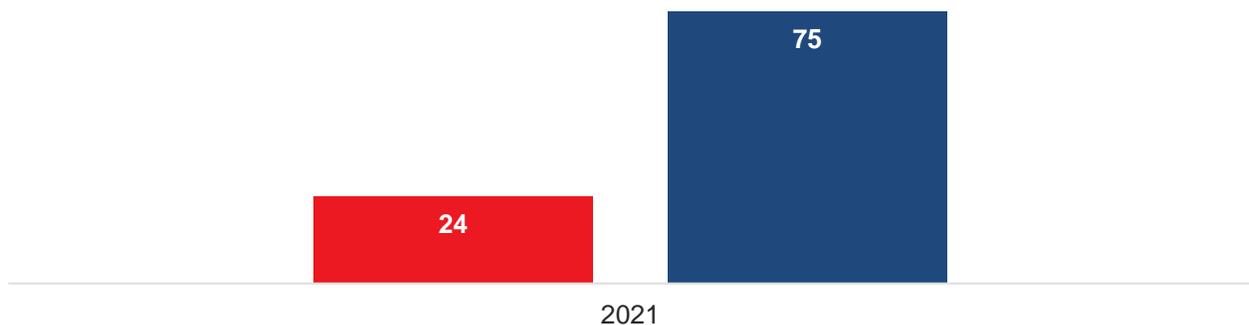
The following are key findings from a recent survey of 500 adults in Connecticut conducted by GBAO on behalf of the Youth First Initiative.

### Connecticut Residents Favor Prevention & Rehabilitation Over Punishment & Incarceration

Connecticut residents overwhelmingly favor a youth justice system that focuses on prevention and rehabilitation (75 percent), with only 24 percent favoring a system focusing on punishment and incarceration. The support for prevention and rehabilitation is high regardless of education level with at least 7-in-10 of those with a college degree (79 percent) and without one (73 percent) holding this view. Democrats, independents, and Republicans all prefer focusing on prevention and rehabilitation with at least 3-in-5 of each party backing this position (90 percent, 70 percent, 63 percent respectively).

#### Punishment & Incarceration vs. Prevention & Rehabilitation

■ Punishment & Incarceration ■ Prevention & Rehabilitation



## Strong Support For Proposals To Reform Youth Justice System In Connecticut

Connecticut residents broadly support a wide range of specific policy proposals aimed at reforming the country's youth justice system into one that focuses on rehabilitation instead of just punitive incarceration policies. Top-testing proposals include involving a youth's family in the design of treatment and rehabilitation services and counselors, spending more money on rehabilitation and mental health services, providing incentives for states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration in communities most impacted by youth prisons, and changing the system so that incarceration is not an automatic response for youth.

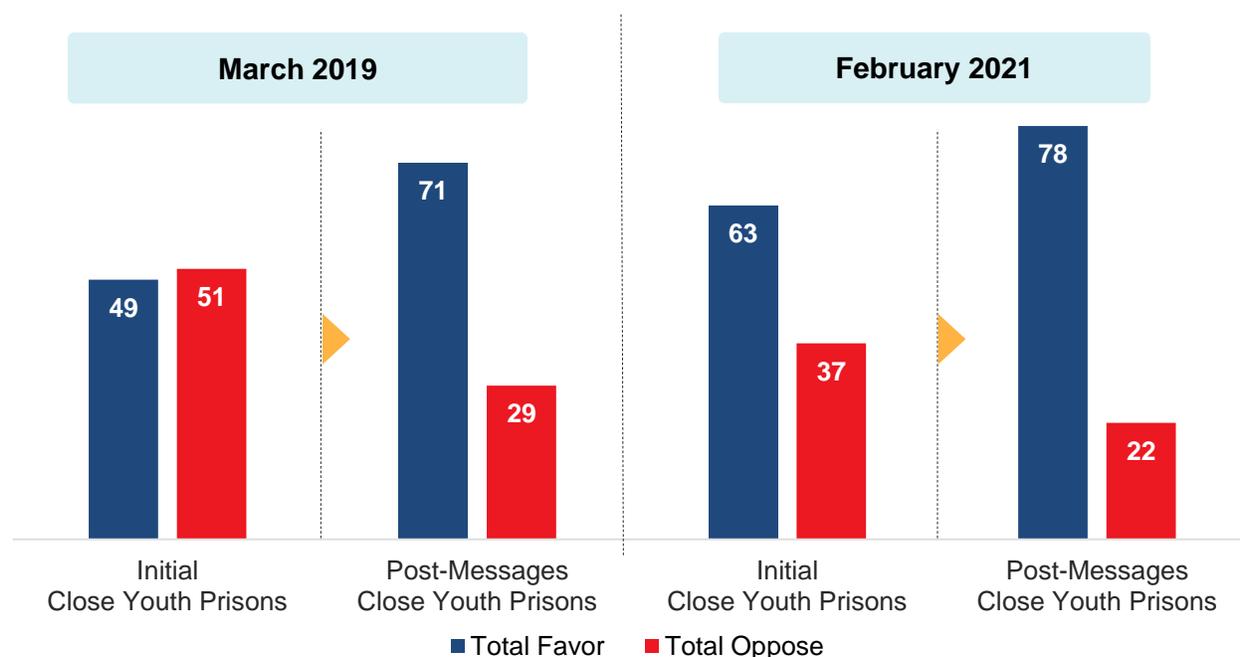
Proposals	Total Favor (%)
Design treatment and rehabilitation plans that include a youth's family in planning and services.	86
Increase spending on youth rehabilitation.	84
Increase spending on social workers and mental health counselors.	83
Provide financial incentives for states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration in the communities most affected by youth prisons, such as intensive rehabilitation, education, job training, community services, and programs that provide youth the opportunity to repair harm to victims and communities.	83
Change the system so that incarceration is not the automatic or default response for youth in the justice system.	80
Require states to address racial inequities in the juvenile justice system.	78
Prohibit the practice of sending young people to facilities outside of their home state and return all young people currently residing in out-of-state facilities back to their home states and communities.	76
Increase funding to provide more public defenders who represent youth in court.	71
Require rigorous community supervision instead of incarceration for youth who commit more serious offenses, unless they are an imminent risk to themselves or others.	71
Prohibit incarcerating youth for probation violations, such as missing appointments or skipping school, and use less severe ways of holding them accountable.	70
End the use of solitary confinement in youth prisons. Solitary confinement is a form of imprisonment in which a person is locked up for 23 hours or more each day in a small, often windowless cell, isolated from any human contact except limited contact with prison staff. It is often used as a form of punishment within prison for rule violations.	68

All of the preceding reform proposals attract majority support across partisan lines. These proposals also draw strong support regardless of education status with at least 7-in-10 Connecticut residents with a four-year college degree and 6-in-10 of those without a college degree backing each one.

### Support For Closing Youth Prisons Is Growing

The poll also finds that 63 percent of Connecticut residents favor closing youth prisons, up from 49 percent in 2019. Majorities of Democrats (79 percent), independents (53 percent), and Republicans (55 percent) support closing youth prisons. When the proposal to close youth prisons includes language focusing specifically on “for-profit youth prisons and confinement centers,” support reaches 71 percent.

After Connecticut residents learn more about the rationale for closing youth prisons, support grows even further—from 63 percent to 78 percent.



### Connecticut Residents Favor Federal Incentives And Funding To Aid Youth Justice Reforms

Connecticut residents overwhelmingly (80 percent) favor Congress providing financial incentives to state and local governments that shift investments away from incarcerating youth and towards community services for youth. Connecticut residents also overwhelmingly (79 percent) favor Congress providing funding for workers who lose their jobs due to youth prison closures to help them find work and help shift local economies away from reliance on youth prisons.

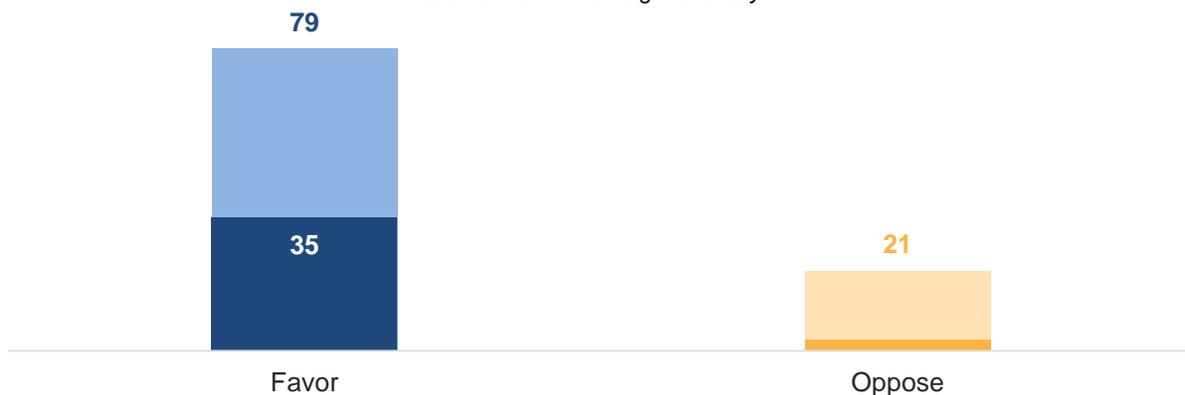
*Do you favor or oppose the U.S. Congress providing financial incentives to states and localities that shift investments away from youth incarceration and towards community services for youth?*

*Darker shade = Stronger intensity*



*Do you favor or oppose Congress providing funding to states to help workers who lose their jobs because of youth prison closures to get new jobs and help shift local economies away from reliance on youth prisons?*

*Darker shade = Stronger intensity*



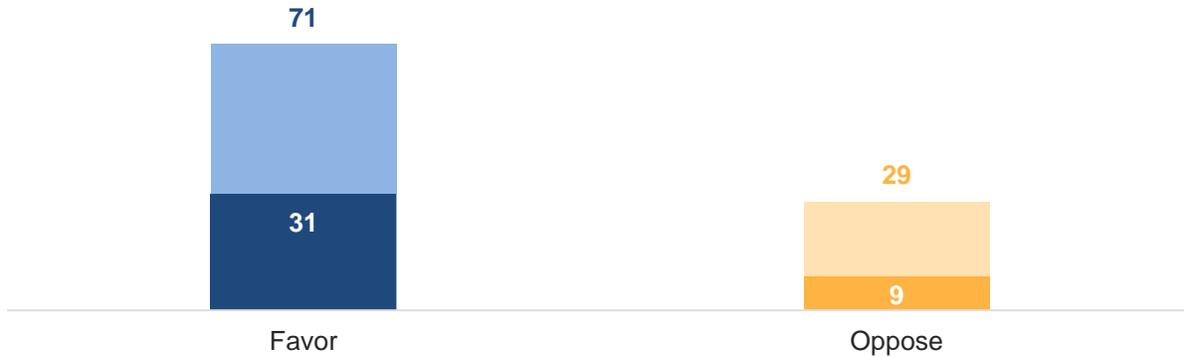
Both of these policies enjoy broad support—with at least 2-in-3 Democrats, independents, and Republicans backing them. These policies have the backing of at least 3-in-4 of both those from law enforcement households and those from non-law enforcement households.

### **Majority Supports Releasing Youth In Order To Slow COVID-19 Spread In Youth Prisons**

Most Connecticut residents (71 percent) support early release for youths deemed not a threat to public safety to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in youth prisons. Releasing youths early also enjoys broad support across partisan lines with a majority of Democrats (82 percent), independents (64 percent), and Republicans (65 percent) backing this position. Connecticut residents under 50 are particularly supportive (75 percent favor).

*In order to reduce the spread of coronavirus in youth prisons, do you favor or oppose the early release of youth in prisons who are not considered to be a serious threat to public safety?*

*Darker shade = Stronger intensity*



### Connecticut Residents Overwhelmingly Believe In Rehabilitation, Counseling, And Giving Youth A Chance To Better Themselves

The support for youth criminal justice reform evident across party and education lines is rooted in the fundamental belief that rehabilitation programs work best, youth should have the opportunity to better themselves, and rehabilitation programs will save taxpayer dollars in the long run. Both law enforcement households (79 percent) and non-law enforcement households (83 percent) believe that rehabilitation is superior to incarceration.

<i>Which statement comes closer to your view?</i>	
When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, the best thing for society is to rehabilitate them so they can become productive members of society.	When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, the best thing for society is to incarcerate them to take them off of the streets.
82	18
The youth justice system should provide youth with more opportunity to better themselves.	The youth justice system should focus on punishing youth who have committed delinquent acts.
76	24
Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system help prevent future delinquent acts.	Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education do little to prevent youth who are in the juvenile justice system from re-entering the juvenile justice system.
76	24

Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are capable of positive growth, and they have the potential to change for the better.	Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are unlikely to change for the better, and they will likely continue a life of illegal behavior.
73	26
Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will save tax dollars in the long run.	Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will cost tax dollars in the long run.
68	32

## Methodology

The survey of 500 adults aged 18+ in Connecticut was conducted February 3-8, 2021 on behalf of the Youth First Initiative. The sample is subject to a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The survey was conducted online using a web-based panel. Care was taken to ensure that the sample is representative of Connecticut's adult population.