

FACT SHEET: YOUTH IN PRISON LIKE ENVIRONMENTS

YOUTH UNDER 25 SHOULD NOT BE IN PRISON-LIKE ENVIRONMENTS

If it looks like a cage, it feels like a cage, and if the true goal of the youth legal system is to rehabilitate kids while holding them accountable, we must stop locking up young people in prison-like environments.

Rehabilitation cannot effectively happen in punitive environments. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the physical design of such environments has made social distancing within prison-like facilities and prisons nearly impossible without subjecting youth to conditions that amount to solitary confinement.

This means removing youth under 18 from REGIONS secure units inside the juvenile detention centers and ending the practices that allow youth to be transferred to adult facilities starting at the age of 15. Those who need out-of-home treatment should be in small, therapeutic facilities that are developmentally appropriate.

YOUTH UNDER 25 SHOULD NOT BE IN ADULT FACILITIES

Currently, youth aged 15-17 whose cases are transferred to adult court are placed in adult facilities pre- and post-trial: Manson Youth Institution (MYI) and York Correctional Institution (York). These facilities, services, and staff are not created for or trained to be effective for youth and therefore are not appropriate for youth under 25.

CTJA recognizes youth as people under the age of 25 and feels strongly that adult prison is not the appropriate placement for this group of people.

In 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published the findings that found “transfer to the adult criminal justice system typically increases rather than decreases rates of violence among transferred youth.” Without access to rehabilitative services and after exposure to de-facto solitary confinement, youth held in adult facilities re-enter their communities with significant barriers to emotional, educational, or vocational success.

In December of 2021, the Department of Justice released a [report](#) that found that children’s civil rights were being violated within the Department of Corrections, specifically at Manson Youth Institution. The Department of Justice found that MYI’s isolation practices and inadequate mental health services seriously harm children and place them at substantial risk of serious harm. In addition, MYI fails to provide adequate special education services to children with disabilities.

BLACK YOUTH ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE TRANSFERRED TO ADULT COURT

A 2017 report on Connecticut data found that in cases that involved discretionary transfer, Black youth were more likely to be transferred to adult court than their white peers. The study looked at other factors like age, previous record, charge, socioeconomic status, etc., but found that *race was the deciding factor*. **In Connecticut, Black youth are 10 times more likely to be held in placement as white youths. Our current system is not fair or equitable.**

REMOVE YOUTH FROM PRISON AND PRISON-LIKE ENVIRONMENTS

- The state must develop a timeline to phase out the use of REGIONS secure units inside the juvenile detention centers
- The state must stop housing any youth under 25 in adult prisons run by the Department of Corrections (DOC)
- Court Support Services Division (CSSD) and DOC should develop their capacity to provide local, intensive, individualized wrap-around supports to and families –this would create community based alternatives to incarceration or out-of-home placement

ADULT PRISON IS INEFFECTIVE

- It does not provide adequate programming or treatment for any of the people that are incarcerated within the Department of Correction, MYI is especially guilty of this. While the 2021 report focused on the negative impact and violation of civil rights of youth under 18 at MYI, those up to the age of 20 that are housed at MYI are also subjected to solitary confinement, chemical agent use, etc.
- Research has shown that sending a young person to adult prison increases their chance to return to prison later in life.
- A consequence should teach a new skill. Incarceration does not do this. Imprisoning someone removes them from their community for a period of time, but does not give them the tools needed to return to their community or the treatment needed to feel better while incarcerated.
- Locking up youth in adult prison does not address root issues. According to a [recent state audit](#), the overwhelming majority of transferred boys, and all of the transferred girls, in the adult system during 2019 lived in families previously investigated for child abuse or neglect, often multiple times. The audit found that most boys in the system completed few or no programs while incarcerated. Young people will most likely be unable to change behaviors until their root issues are addressed and taken care of.