

Substantive and Tactical Strategies

The Real Costs and Benefits of Change: Finding Opportunities for Reform During Difficult Fiscal Times

General:

- National report released by the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN).
- Includes strategies to realign and reduce spending while maintaining positive youth programs.
- Now is a key time to discuss ways to deinstitutionalize youth, and show how several states have saved money by investing in alternatives to detention such as community-based treatment and youth programs.

The Issue:

- Several states have saved money by investing in alternatives to detention such as community-based treatment and other evidence-based programs.
- During a fiscal crisis, despite their cost-saving benefits and efficacy, programs shown to prevent delinquency and help justice-involved youth get back on track are often the first items on the “chopping block.” Lawmakers should be encouraged to keep and maintain these crucial, proven programs.
- Programs that focus on prevention and treatment have been successfully implemented by states such as Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, California, and New York and have demonstrated improved outcomes for youth, increased public safety, and reduced costs.
- This financial crisis is a good time for policymakers to consider closing and downsizing facilities – ensuring that more young people receive community-based services, which have been shown to be less expensive and more effective.

Principal Strategies of the Report:

Substantive strategies for maintaining effective alternatives to incarceration of youth include:

- **Fiscal realignment** – Several states have successfully provided local jurisdictions with financial incentives that keep youth out of facilities by encouraging community-based programs.
 - Ohio has saved between \$11 and \$45 in commitment and processing costs for every one dollar spent on RECLAIM (Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors) Ohio.
- **Downsizing detention** – Some states have found ways to save money by closing or downsizing detention facilities.
 - Pierce County, Washington saved \$800,000 by closing a 50-bed unit in its detention facility and reinvested the funds in community-based alternatives to detention.



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- **Evaluating current programs** – Significant savings can be had if policymakers shut down ineffective institutions and programs and redirect spending to cost-effective programs.
 - In 2005, the Washington State legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to examine options that would reduce the need for prison beds, save taxpayers money, and increase public safety. The evaluation concluded that implementation of a “moderate to aggressive portfolio” of evidence-based options for both adults and youth in the state could result in avoidance of a significant level of future prison construction, \$2 billion in taxpayer savings, and reduced crime rates.
- **Redirecting funds to progressive youth programs** – Redirecting funds from the bloated adult justice system into positive youth programs can provide long-term savings as well.
 - Texas’ reinvestment in prevention, diversion and treatment is an example of how savings from the adult system can be applied broadly to prevention programs that benefit youth.

Tactical strategies for encouraging lawmakers to invest in more effective policies include:

- **Reframing the Issue** – Lawmakers should be encouraged to consider changes as investments in public safety and crime reduction rather than oversimplifying the issue by making it all about cost savings.
- **Use cost-benefit research** – Advocates should seek out cost-benefit data specific to their states, as well as be aware of data from other states that can be used as examples. For instance, researchers estimate that the present value of preventing a high-risk youth at age 14 from entering the justice system is \$3.2 million to \$5.8 million, including both the cost associated with delinquency and criminal behavior and the lost productivity within the community.
- **Develop relationships with state fiscal offices** – Advocates should make efforts to work with their state fiscal offices to ensure a complete, long-term economic analysis of any proposed changes to the law. Encourage fiscal offices to analyze data beyond just one or two years, as often the most significant savings stemming from juvenile justice reform are realized several years into the future.
- **Long term outcomes** – Focusing on long-term outcomes (5-10 years) can show lawmakers the effectiveness of progressive reform.
- **Develop new partnerships** – Advocates are encouraged to reach out to new and unlikely allies, such as social services. Creating partnerships with new allies can provide advocates with access to new voices and research bases that can lead to a powerful and unified voice for change.
- **Showing the public support** – Polling data that shows the public favors rehabilitation and other positive programs for youth will help encourage lawmakers to support these types of programs. For example, eighty-nine percent of respondents in a 2007 poll agreed that almost all youth who commit crimes have the potential to change. Numerous polls show that the public believes that rehabilitation and treatment reduce crime and is will to pay additional taxes for such services.