

To: Interested Parties

From: GBA Strategies

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## Poll Results on Youth Justice Reform

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On the heels of recent bipartisan efforts to reform the youth justice system, the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing parole hearings for youth offenders, and the Department of Justice decision to ban solitary confinement of youth, a new poll shows Americans overwhelmingly support shifting the youth justice system from incarceration and punishment to prevention and rehabilitation. A clear 77% majority favors this shift with broad support across partisanship (79% of Democrats, 80% of Independents, and 71% of Republicans).

The following are key findings from the survey of 1,000 adults in the U.S. age 18+:

### CLEAR SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL TO REFORM THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Not only do Americans support this shift in general, they also support a range of specific policy proposals aimed at addressing problems with the youth justice system, including the misguided focus on incarceration, racial and ethnic disparities in the system and the shortage of public defenders.

	Total Favor (%)
Design treatment and rehabilitation plans that include a youth's family in planning and services	89
Provide financial incentives for states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration, such as intensive rehabilitation, education, job training, community services, and programs that provide youth the opportunity to repair harm to victims and communities	83
Require states to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system	70
Increase funding to provide more public defenders who represent children in court	69
Close youth prisons and redirect the savings to community-based programs including intensive ones designed for youth who pose a serious threat to public safety	54

For each of these proposals, support is very similar for people who say they or their immediate families have been victims of crime as for those who haven't been crime victims. Moreover, all five proposals garner majority support from Democrats and Independents, and 4 of 5 receive majority Republican support.

Support is particularly high among demographics most likely to have interaction with the youth justice system – African Americans, Latinos, and younger Americans.

In addition to supporting initiatives to reduce incarceration, Americans clearly support a series of reform proposals aimed at institutions that house youth who pose a risk to society and need a secure facility. These include proposals to increase family contact and protect youth offenders.

	Total Favor (%)
Create an independent commission of community leaders tasked with ensuring that youth are protected from abuse while in state or local custody	87
Require facilities that incarcerate youth to let youth see their families at least once a week	86
Require that incarcerated youth are placed in facilities within 60 miles of their families	80
Require that youth are placed in facilities with no more than 30 other youth	72

**UNDERLYING VALUES FOCUSED ON REHABILITATION**

Support for these proposals to reform the youth justice system are rooted in the core believe that youth who commit delinquent acts are capable of positive growth and have the ability to change for the better (78%) and a feeling that the best thing for society is to rehabilitate these youth so they can become productive members of society (79%) vs. the alternative statement that they should remain incarcerated to keep our streets safer.

When it comes to the youth justice system, Americans place a premium on rehabilitation as a means to prevent recidivism. They also believe that taking responsibility is not predicated on incarceration and that we should not incarcerate for offenses that would not be crimes if committed by adults.

	Total Agree (%)
When it comes to youth offenders, what is most important is that the system does a better job of making sure that he or she gets back on track and is less likely to commit another offense	92
Youth should not be placed in juvenile corrections facilities for offenses that would not be crimes if they were adults, such as skipping school or running away from home	83
Teaching youth who commit an offense to take responsibility for his or her actions does not require incarceration	73
Technical violations of probation and other types of supervision, such as missing curfew or testing positive for drug use, should not result in placement in a youth prison	60

In sum, the poll shows broad public support for an aggressive effort to reform the youth justice system in the U.S., placing a greater focus on rehabilitation than incarceration and addressing fundamental problems created by the current system.

### **Methodology**

The survey of 1,000 adults age 18+ in the U.S. was conducted January 19-24, 2016 on behalf of Youth First. The sample is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.1 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 the U.S. adult population.