



# Shifting Resources from Youth Incarceration to Investing in Youth in their Communities

*Backgrounder and Federal Recommendations*

## Overview

In the last decade, states have undertaken reforms to reduce youth incarceration by more than fifty percent. However, all youth have not benefited equally and states still devote the largest share of their juvenile justice resources to youth prisons at an estimated \$5 billion per year. If youth prisons were closed, tens of millions of dollars could be freed up for community-based alternatives to youth incarceration and other youth-serving programs, services & opportunities. According to a national poll by [GBA Strategies](#) the American public supports a shift away from incarceration and towards serving youth in their communities. Federal policymakers can accelerate reforms by helping states & localities to close, dismantle & repurpose youth prisons; investing in youth in their communities; and centering directly impacted youth and their families in crafting federal policy solutions.

# Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

**1. Close, dismantle & repurpose youth prisons.** States spend tens of thousands of dollars every year to lock up a single young person – and it doesn't work. By investing in better solutions, taxpayers save millions while communities grow stronger and safer.

- Create a new \$100 million federal incentives competitive grant program to states & localities to close youth prisons, repurpose for non correctional purposes, support correctional staff impacted by the closure, help communities impacted by closure on new economic development plans, support communities to expand youth-serving programs, services and opportunities.

**2. Invest in youth in their communities.** Closing youth prisons is the first step in the right direction, but we also need to invest in communities so we can begin addressing the underlying issues in young people's lives.

- Direct the [Federal Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice](#) to expand technical assistance to localities to maximize existing federal funding opportunities to create and expand a continuum of care for youth in their communities, such as [Families First Prevention Services Act](#), [Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act](#), [Victims of Crime Act](#), & the [Community Development Block Grant program](#).
- Provide robust technical assistance to states & localities to create and expand a continuum of care through a new collaboration between the US Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development.
- Ensure directly impacted youths' access to federally funded youth-serving programs (e.g. mentoring, after-school, community service, youth employment) by removing barriers to participation (e.g. juvenile or criminal records, participation fees, etc.).

**3. Center federal youth justice policy on directly-impacted youth & their families.** An effective continuum of care puts communities at the center of the process so that the people closest to a youth can drive the outcome.

- Establish a federal youth advisory committee to the US Department of Justice for ten directly impacted youth representing all regions of the county to advise federal agencies on all aspects of youth justice policy and programs.
- Partner with philanthropic foundations to create a new two-year youth fellowship program for five directly impacted youth to work at federal agencies and congressional committees to advise on all youth policy & programmatic areas.
- Initiate a “[Families of Incarcerated Children](#)” program in the Children’s Bureau of the Administration of Children & Families at the US Department of Health & Human Services to provide information on parent resources, peer-to-peer supports for families and best practices on supporting families.
- Appoint at least two directly impacted youth and two directly impacted family members to the Federal Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice.



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