

WHY JUVENILE JUSTICE MATTERS TO COUNTIES

It matters because the juvenile justice system has a direct impact on counties' investments in health, justice and social services. It matters because juvenile justice systems cost more to counties than the benefits they bring to the community. And it matters because effective juvenile justice systems can divert youth from future involvement in the adult criminal justice system, where counties already spend more than \$70 billion each year.

County governments are uniquely positioned to be leaders in the juvenile justice field and have a dramatic impact on the lives of their young residents, families and the broader community. As the primary local provider of health, justice and social services, counties have the opportunity and responsibility to implement comprehensive, evidence-based programs and policies that bolster public safety and improve human outcomes. The National Association of Counties (NACo) has joined the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change Juvenile Justice Reform Initiative* to educate and assist county leaders as they undertake important improvements to benefit communities and reduce costs.

Traditional Juvenile Justice Practices Are Expensive and Produce Poor Outcomes. Kids who end up in juvenile detention are less likely to graduate high school, less likely to find employment and more likely to reoffend as adults. Incarcerating kids is expensive, and counties foot the bill for many of the related costs and services. Counties pay for the operation of detention centers, medical and mental health care and education services for incarcerated youth. The expense of running a locked detention facility ranges by jurisdiction, but often costs \$200-\$300 per day per youth. The costs grown even higher over time, as juveniles who are detained and adjudicated are more likely to end up in the adult system.

Youth in Juvenile Justice Have Major Behavioral Health and Other Needs. Fewer than 5 percent of youth who are arrested are arrested for violent crimes.¹ The vast majority of youth end up in the juvenile justice system for non-violent or relatively minor offenses, and all too often a contributing factor to their contact with the justice system is an unmet need for behavioral health treatment.

- Up to 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system suffer from mental health disorders.
- Over 60 percent of those with a mental health disorder also have a substance use disorder.
- Among those with mental health disorders, 27 percent have disorders so severe that their ability to function is significantly impaired.²

Many juvenile justice systems are ill-equipped to serve these youth; in fact, many do not even have the tools to *identify* these youth.

Counties Can Introduce Alternatives That Produce Better Outcomes and Cost Less. Community-based services are less costly than detention and more effective than care in correctional facilities. Most juvenile offenders are less likely to be involved in future delinquent behavior when they remain in the community and receive services that address their underlying needs. Detention is among the least effective strategies to reduce crime, yet counties spend staggering sums on these systems.³ Alternatively, diversion and proven therapeutic programs produce as much as \$13 worth of benefit for every \$1 spent.⁴

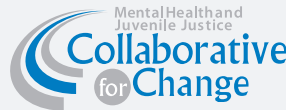
Counties now have access to good tools that can identify youth who would be better served with treatment rather than jail time. In the short term, this type of early intervention helps ensure that youth are engaged in school, are receiving appropriate treatments and services and do not fall further into the justice system. Long term, such reforms can help counties keep costs down as fewer youth reoffend and end up in the adult criminal justice system, saving money and lives.

Through its partnership with *Models for Change* and its explicit commitment to improving juvenile justice, NACO will share effective ways to improve juvenile justice, even as county leaders grapple with tight budgets and tough fiscal decisions. NACO will provide written publications, webinars, blog posts, podcasts and forums at sites around the country.

To learn more about the *Models for Change Resource Center Partnership* and access toolkits as well as examples from counties that have improved their juvenile justice systems, visit the sites to the right and <http://www.naco.org/programs/csd/Pages/Models-for-Change.aspx>.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Juvenile Arrest Rates.* Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/JAR.asp>.
- 2 *Frequently Asked Questions.* National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Available at <http://www.ncmhjj.com/resources/faq/>.
- 3 Holman, Barry & Ziedenberg, Justin. *The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities.* Justice Policy Institute, November 2006 at 11. Available at http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/06-11_rep_dangersofdetention_jj.pdf.
- 4 Holman, Barry & Ziedenberg, Justin. *The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities.* Justice Policy Institute, November 2006 at 11. Available at http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/06-11_rep_dangersofdetention_jj.pdf.



The Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Collaborative for Change, led by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, promotes and supports adoption of new resources, tools, and program models that allow states and local communities to better respond to youth with mental health needs in the juvenile justice system. It works with sites nationally to provide training, technical assistance, and education. <http://cfc.ncmhjj.com>



The Status Offense Reform Center (SORC) at the Vera Institute of Justice serves as a clearinghouse of information and assistance for practitioners and policymakers in juvenile justice, with a focus on encouraging and showcasing strategies to safely and effectively divert non-delinquent youth from the formal juvenile justice system. www.vera.org/project/status-offense-reform-center



The National Juvenile Defender Center (NJDC) improves access to counsel and the quality of representation for children in the justice system. NJDC bolsters juvenile defense by: supporting the creation and replication of field-driven innovations, facilitating the adoption of new juvenile justice defense standards, and developing a corps of certified juvenile indigent defense trainers. www.njdc.info



Led by the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice builds the capacity of state and local leaders and practitioners to address the unique needs of dual status youth, coordinate and integrate child-serving systems, and improve juvenile probation systems. <http://www.rfknrcj.org>

For even more information, visit:

Juvenile Justice Resource Hub

The Juvenile Justice Resource Hub is a comprehensive source of information on cutting-edge juvenile justice issues and reform trends. It provides ready access to reliable, accurate, curated information and analysis on juvenile justice issues, including relevant research, best practice models, policy levers for reform, toolkits and experts in the field. www.jjie.org/hub

Models for Change Website

The Models for Change website contains a wealth of reports, research summaries, issue briefs, working documents and other materials to support system change efforts produced by Models for Change grantees and partners. www.modelsforchange.net



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