



National Prevention Science Coalition

*to improve lives*

## Fact Sheet: Juvenile Justice Reform and the Role of Prevention Science in Federal Policy

### Introduction

As lawmakers consider the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) of 1974, there is an opportunity to identify the most effective approaches for meaningful and sustained juvenile justice reforms. As such, NPSC advocates for increased federal investments to promote and adequately support state and local jurisdictions in the selection and implementation of evidence-based preventive interventions. Such interventions are critically important in the design and delivery of a cost-effective continuum of integrated and well-coordinated juvenile justice system services. This factsheet looks at the impact of juvenile delinquency on society and encourages prevention-oriented approaches for consideration to strengthen the federal leadership role in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.

### Fiscal, Social and Other Societal Impacts

In 2011, estimates indicate that law enforcement made nearly 1.5 million arrests of juveniles (Puzzanchera, 2013). On a given day that same year, 61,423 juvenile offenders were held in 2,047 juvenile residential placement facilities (Hockenberry, 2014). An additional 1,790 were held in adult jails and prisons (Carson & Sabol, 2012). According to the Justice Policy Institute (2014), the average annual direct cost of incarceration for juveniles ranges from \$7.9 to \$21.47 billion a year. Indirect costs to youth, families, victims, and communities are many times higher.

Lambie and Randell (2013) note: “Increasingly, research points to the negative effects of incarcerating youth offenders, particularly in adult facilities.....Incarceration often results in negative behavioral and mental health consequences, including ongoing offending behaviors and contact with the justice system.” Responses that are primarily punitive in their approach (as opposed to rehabilitative) escalate youths’ propensities for recidivism, youth self-harm, substance use/abuse, dropout from school, and unemployment-underemployment in later years. For example, King et al. (2011) studied childhood maltreatment and psychiatric disorders among youth in a large urban juvenile detention center and found that 76% of girls and 68% of boys had suffered physical abuse (severe or moderate), and 41% of girls and 11% of boys reported some type of sexual abuse in their lifetime. These maltreated youth had higher rates of psychiatric disorders than youth who had not been maltreated. Untreated trauma significantly heightens the risk for repeated victimization, substance abuse, aggressive behaviors, academic failure and delinquency (Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012). For these and other reasons, a developmental approach to reforming the juvenile justice system is now an imperative (National Research Council, 2013).

Accumulating evidence indicates that significant negative, lasting impacts may result from some juvenile justice system interventions (Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012). Research on adolescent brain development has potential to revolutionize the way in which we treat juveniles for a substantially greater improvement in outcomes than we see using current approaches ([link](#)).

Involvement in the juvenile justice system leads to particularly harsh consequences for youth of color -- of those youth confined in juvenile facilities in 2011, male minority youth far outnumbered white and female juveniles. While minorities comprised 43% of the national juvenile population, the minority proportion of the total population in juvenile facilities was 68% (40% black, 23% Hispanic, 2% American Indian; 1% Asian).

## Prevention Science's Response

Federal investments in well implemented, effective prevention and early intervention programs can lead to *substantial economic and societal benefits*. Early childhood interventions, school and community based prevention programs now have well-documented cost benefits as well as public safety, education, workforce development and other outcomes.

Juvenile justice reforms in several states illustrate the benefits of shifting dollars from ineffective incarceration strategies toward much more impactful community-based approaches that rely on well-implemented evidence based programs ([link](#)). Texas has reduced juvenile justice correctional spending by \$150 million between 2007-2012, and redirected over \$50 million to county level juvenile justice-probation departments - yet, rearrest rates are down for both incarcerated as well as community probation youths. Other states have similarly shifted and reinvested, relying on evidence based programs to support these trends ([link](#)).

Early interventions and early risk-reduction approaches appear to provide some of the largest cost-benefits (e.g., Nurse Family Partnership, Fast Track Project, High Scope Perry Preschool Program, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, etc.). Every dollar invested can return \$7-10. Programs targeting youth offenders have been demonstrated to save taxpayers up to \$32,915 per youth offender. Below are examples of effective evidenced-based interventions as well as juvenile justice system reforms.

### *Evidenced Based Interventions*

- A review of strategies used in Washington State found that many evidence based programs return substantial savings and reduce recidivism ([link](#)).
- Vocational education and treatment for mental illness or substance abuse reduce recidivism and offer average savings of \$20,714 and \$19,118 per adult offender ([link](#)).
- Evidence-based services provided in the community have been proven to reduce recidivism by more than 20 percent and provide upwards of \$10 worth of benefit for every \$1 spent.

### *Other Examples of Juvenile Justice System Reform*

- In Sedgwick County, Kansas, collaboration with local school systems helped reduce school-based arrests for disorderly conduct by 37 percent in just the first year of the initiative. Between 2007 and 2014 admissions to state custody were reduced from 310 to 134; juvenile correctional facility admissions went from 147 to 66; juvenile filings went from 1745 to 1099; the average daily population (ADP) in locked juvenile detention went from 73 to 55; and overall the ADP dropped from 120 to 99.

- Wayne County, Michigan has decreased the daily number of youth in detention from more than 500 to approximately 100, and estimates that more than 5,000 juveniles have been diverted from the juvenile justice system. The recidivism rate has dropped from 56 percent in 1998 to 16 percent in 2013.

## Summary

Less than 5% of high risk youth involved in the juvenile justice system actually receive evidence-based programming ([link](#)). Yet research clearly documents the substantial benefits from intervening early in family, school and community-based settings - *preferably before youths enter the juvenile justice system*. Once engaged by law enforcement and/or the court system, there are a myriad of very effective evidence based prevention approaches that have been shown to afford better behavioral and developmental outcomes while saving substantial taxpayer dollars. Embedding prevention-oriented policy goals in a reauthorized Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act can enhance federal leadership in these areas, generate long-term benefits to society as well as the youths involved, and create more cost-beneficial outcomes at every level of government as well as in the private sector.

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