

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/families-over-facilities-prioritize-the-health-safety-of-our-children/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Times of crisis demand bold action. That's why Children's Rights is calling for urgent policy changes now across the country to get children and youth out of jail, detention, group homes and institutions and into family homes.

For the vast majority of children, the risk to their health in facilities cannot be justified. The COVID-19 emergency demands an immediate halt to all new entries into jail or detention facilities. For youth already in detention, agencies should immediately conduct a case-by-case assessment of every youth to determine whether there is a family home where they can be placed, with supportive services, and if the answer is yes, that child should be moved there as quickly as possible.

For youth in the foster care system, no new children should be entering group homes or residential treatment facilities, unless there is an acute health need so severe that time-limited placement under all applicable health precautions is the only option to treat a child's individual needs. For children already in group homes and residential facilities, again, we are calling for an immediate case-by-case assessment of every youth to determine whether there is a family home where they can be placed, with supportive services, and if the answer is yes, that child should be moved there as quickly as possible.

This is not a new idea. For many years now and backed up by federal law, the goal for children in the child welfare system, except in the most extreme situations, is to grow up in families—their own families whenever possible or with foster families when that's not possible and not in facilities. Children need to be kept safe. In this COVID-19 pandemic, group facilities expose both children and the staff who care for them to the risk of infection. Connecticut and California, for example, are both working on thoughtful protocols for the release of youth in juvenile justice facilities.

In these harrowing times, children especially need the support of adults in a family environment who can care for them with love and compassion. To make this possible, we support efforts now underway to increase financial support to potential families who stand by willing and eager to provide a loving home.

We need to prioritize the health and safety of our children. It's got to be families over facilities now more than ever. Now more than ever, we must continue to fight for children's health and safety by removing them from crowded detention facilities. [Add your name to tell your elected officials to bring our children home.](#)

Now is not the time to pause. Amplify the message organizations and medical professionals are sending to government officials across the nation. Youth must be released from dangerous facilities where they can't social distance during COVID-19. [Tell your elected officials to bring our children home.](#)

Speak out: Loudly declare that children housed in facilities must be placed in homes immediately. Post on social media and write a letter to the editor demanding that news outlets continue to cover these issues. Choose from a selection of graphics and sample posts for social media below.

[Families over Facilities Toolkit:](#) Here's what you can do today to help release youth from facilities and unite them with families.

#ProtectKids and #FreeOurYouth @ChildrensRights

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