

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-good-start-on-fixing-the-empire-states-juvenile-justice-system>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Wednesday's *New York Times* brought welcome news: According to a piece by [Nicholas Confessore](#), New York Governor David Paterson has introduced a bill to kick-start reform of the state's juvenile justice system, a sustained focus for those of us who work in the Vera Institute of Justice's [Center on Youth Justice](#).

The governor's proposal would reserve incarceration for young people who have been found guilty of a violent crime or a sex crime, or those whom a judge deemed to be a serious risk to him or herself or others. He also proposed creating an independent monitor for facilities run by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

Reducing the number of kids who are removed from their communities would get things moving in the right direction, away from a punitive model and toward a community-based, therapeutic model for responding to young people who have gotten into trouble.

It makes good sense for the kids and their communities: after all, the rates of recidivism—crimes by repeat offenders—are higher among kids who have been in the juvenile equivalent of prison than for those who stay connected to their families and enter therapy-based programs. And it can't come too soon. Since a 2009 U.S. Department of Justice investigation found that New York's juvenile justice system was rife with abuse, inequity, and neglect, Vera has been working with OCFS and [the Governors Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice](#) to identify the problems, point the way toward solutions, and assist the state in putting those new approaches into effect.

Vera is keeping track of the 20 recommendations in the task force report. The governor's recent announcement is an important step in the right direction.

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