

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/our-10-year-strategy-to-end-girls-incarceration-nationwide>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Last month, we announced our 10-year strategy to end the incarceration of youth on the girls side of the juvenile justice system.

Getting to zero girls in 10 years is ambitious but achievable. The number of girls in juvenile justice confinement has dropped significantly over the past few decades. Reforms have reduced the annual number of girls detentions to less than 46,000 nationwide from nearly 100,000 in the early 2000s.¹ And in 2015, most states had fewer than 150 girls in long-term placement many fewer than 50.²

While these numbers are exciting, what's happening with the small population that is left in these girls facilities is unjust and for the most part not talked about. They are disproportionately poor girls and gender expansive youth of color who have endured instability, lack of family resources, gender-based violence, and trauma, only to be pushed into custody when child-serving systems fail them. At a time when gender and racial justice has come to the fore of our national consciousness, how can we leave these girls behind?

Vera's [Initiative to End Girls Incarceration](#) centers girls and gender expansive youth in reforms that have too long exclusively focused on cisgender boys. We are working with targeted jurisdictions across the country who are ready to examine the gender and racial inequities that exist across their child-serving systems and that help shape the ways in which girls and gender expansive youth of color end up in confinement.

In February 2017, Vera partnered with New York City's juvenile justice and social service agencies to create the Task Force to End Girls Incarceration in NYC. Since this work began, the city has cut its population of girls in long-term placement from 56 to just 17. City agencies are now implementing multiple pilot initiatives that will further drive down numbers by improving the safety and well-being of girls and gender expansive youth in their communities.

In 2018, we took this work national by [expanding our technical assistance](#) to sites across the country that are ready to join NYC in getting to zero. The Initiative to End Girls Incarceration now reaches nine targeted states across the country, and we are incubating new solutions to some of the longest-standing challenges around girls incarceration.

It's time we stop locking up girls and, instead, build stronger, safer, and more equitable communities where they are no longer criminalized for the violence and discrimination they face. Vera believes that this is within reach and we are building a coordinated, national effort to get us there.

1. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, [Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement](#).

2. Ibid.

PUBLICATION

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