

# Children's Defense Fund

## Children's Rights

<https://www.childrensdefense.org/blog/fund-care-not-cages/>

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

**October is Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM).** The youth criminal justice system is far from just young people remain over-policed and over-criminalized, pushing Black children and other children of color into a system proven to cause long-lasting harm. YJAM is an opportunity to connect virtually, learn more about the harms of our current systems, and take action to support our young people!

**Continued reliance on criminalization and incarceration puts our nations children especially Black children at risk of lasting harm to their [health, development, and well-being](#).**

Though child arrests and detention have decreased significantly over the past decade, [43,580 children](#) were held in juvenile residential placement and another 935 were held in adult prisons on an average night in 2017. These institutional placements aren't limited to children that pose a risk to themselves or others. The majority (roughly 70 percent) of incarcerated youth are held on non-violent offenses; many are held while awaiting trial or sentencing and many are also held for [largely minor offenses](#) like technical violations or status offenses.

Because of [racist policies and over-policing](#) in communities of color, children of color and especially Black children overwhelmingly bear the brunt of criminalization and incarceration. Black children are [2.5 times more likely](#) to be arrested than white children, 4.6 times more likely to be committed or detained, and 9 times more likely to receive an adult prison sentence.

**This [over-reliance on institutional placements also exists within the child welfare system](#), despite evidence that institutionalization is detrimental to children's development, well-being, and ability to heal from the trauma they have experienced, and that children do best when placed with families.**

While the number of children living in congregate care has been steadily decreasing, [more than 43,000 youth lived in institutional placements in 2018](#). Congregate care placements in the child welfare system are meant to be temporary and only for children with a mental or behavioral health treatment need that cannot be met in a family setting. Yet, children are often inappropriately placed in these settings without a clinical need or are held long after their clinical needs are met. What's more, Black and Indigenous children are placed in congregate care settings at higher rates than white children, [leading to worse outcomes](#) including being less likely to be reunited with their families and more likely to reach adulthood without a permanent support system.

Think of Us recent report [Away From Home: Youth Experiences of Institutional Placements in Foster Care](#), highlights the harms of these institutional placements in the words of youth who experienced them. Young people in these placements report limited access to basic necessities, lack of educational stability and resources, overly harsh and unproductive discipline, discrimination, and abuse. Further, they report that institutional placements fail to address the very mental health needs they are intended to heal, that institutional practices compound the trauma youth have experienced, and that placement in institutions prevents youth from building the relationships they need to heal and develop.

**It's time to shift funding from harmful placements to supports for children and families.** Congress should prioritize effective community-led, family-focused, youth-centered programs to ensure young people have the resources and supports they need to thrive within their families and communities.

**Get involved!**

**Join the conversation on social media** using the hashtags #YJAM2021 #YouthJusticeNow

A gift today helps children get the help they need

The Children's Defense Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our Federal Tax ID number is 52-0895622.

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Fight for children, stay informed and know when to act.