

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/recommendations-for-juvenile-justice-reform-opportunities-for-action-in-the-112th-congress/>

Campaign and Advocacy

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Nationwide each year, police make 2.1 million juvenile arrests; 1.7 million cases are referred to juvenile courts; and over 200,000 youth are prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system. Far too many young people are securely detained for firsttime, nonviolent offenses that would not be illegal if committed by an adult (i.e., status offenses such as truancy). On any given night, approximately 81,000 youth are confined in juvenile facilities, and 10,000 children are held in adult jails and prisons. Incarcerated youth are vulnerable to victimization and abuse by peers, older inmates, and staff. The United States is also alone in imposing the sentence of life without the possibility of parole youth whose crimes were committed when they were under the age of 18. Recent estimates find that 2,589 people are currently serving a life without parole sentence for a crime committed as a juvenile.

Current juvenile justice practices often ignore childrens amenability to rehabilitation, causing longterm collateral consequences for youth, wasting taxpayer dollars, and violating our deepest held principles about equal justice under the law and the role of the juvenile justice system. Our system demonstrates racial and ethnic disparities, lacks sound mental health and drug treatment services, and applies excessively harsh sanctions for minor and nonviolent adolescent misconduct.

With strong federal leadership, reforms are possible. Research over the past 20 years has increased our understanding of what works, and how to best approach juvenile delinquency and system reform. Promising reforms are being implemented in many jurisdictions, and there is an increasingly clear path for moving toward evidencebased approaches to reducing adolescent crime. Members of Congress have the opportunity to restore an effective system of juvenile justice for our youth.

This report was produced by the National Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (NJJDPC), which brings together a collaborative array of youth- and family-serving, social justice, law enforcement, corrections, and faith-based organizations to ensure healthy families, build strong communities, and improve public safety by promoting fair and effective policies, practices and programs for youth involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

To read the report, download the PDF below.

People in prison is serving a life sentence

Sentencing Policy

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