

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-call-for-innovation>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The recently released [report from Governor Patersons Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State](#) contains some jarring and eye-opening information about a system in dire need of reform. It also outlines a set of carefully considered recommendations for how to go about rebuilding a system that government stakeholders now admit has become entrenched, ineffective, and toxic. The candor and self-reflective quality of the report is refreshing and exactly what we have come to expect from the leaders of the juvenile justice system reform movement underway in the City and the State - leaders like Gladys Carrion, OCFS outspoken commissioner who has immediately begun [using the report to promote important system changes](#) and Patricia Brennan, the innovative, straight-talking acting commissioner of NYC Probation who broke the ice and brought the first treatment alternative to incarceration to NYC Family Court five years ago.

Not to be overlooked among the reports revelations of abuse and inadequate services, the all-important calls for better oversight, and the sensible recommendation that certain evidence-based programs be introduced as alternatives to incarceration is perhaps the reports most powerful recommendation: a call for innovation. Recommendation 5, Strategy 5-2 calls for supporting program developers to test new things and be creative in combining best practices into new programs. Sounds simple enough. But while nobody would openly argue against the importance of implementing research-tested programs, many believe that the pressure stakeholders feel to choose from a narrow list of nationally known evidence-based programs has had the unintended effect of stifling innovation in juvenile justice settings.

As the developer of a drug treatment model for juvenile justice system-involved adolescents called [Adolescent Portable Therapy](#), and as one of the folks at Vera who answered a similar call for innovation eight years ago - we took the chance of being creative and trying something new in order to fill a drug treatment gap for youth caught up in the system - I applaud this recommendation. But I also know following through will require funders and stakeholders to take risks, try new ideas, and fund programs with a limited evidence base. This is the Task Forces recommendation that I feel stands the best chance of inspiring real change in a system thats ripe for innovation.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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