

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/recommendations-for-juvenile-justice-reform-opportunities-for-the-obama-administration/>

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. 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 particularly vulnerable to victimization and abuse by peers, older inmates, and staff. Also, the United States is alone in imposing the sentence of life without parole for crimes committed when under the age of 18. Recent estimates find that 2,589 people are currently serving a juvenile life without parole sentence for a crime committed as a juvenile.

Current juvenile justice practices often ignore childrens amenability to rehabilitation, cause longterm collateral consequences, waste taxpayer dollars, and violate 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 misbehavior.

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 across the country, and there is an increasingly clear path for moving toward evidencebased approaches to reducing adolescent crime. The Obama Administration has 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 (NJJJPC), 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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