

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/abuses-at-nys-juvenile-correctional-facilities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

A [recently published letter](#) to Governor David Paterson from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) presents a heartbreaking picture of [events in four New York State juvenile correctional facilities](#). Reading the account of broken bones, bruises, and psychological pain that youth have experienced within these institutions left me deeply saddened. Unfortunately, such stories are not unique to New York State. In recent years, DOJ has filed lawsuits against juvenile justice agencies in at least 11 states.

That's why it is important to remember that there are also jurisdictions in this country that offer a better way of caring for youth in state custody. For example, a recent [New York Times article](#) describes how Missouri's custodial system is treating youth with dignity and respect in nurturing settings that emphasize therapy and rehabilitation rather than punishment and control.

To its credit, New York State is already looking at jurisdictions like Missouri for inspiration. For the past two years, under the leadership of Commissioner Gladys Carrin, the Office of Children and Family Services which is responsible for youth in state custody has been working aggressively to improve the services, climate, and culture of the state's institutional placement facilities. And in September 2008 Governor Paterson launched a [statewide task force](#) to accelerate the state's reform efforts.

I may be biased—Vera's Center on Youth Justice is providing technical assistance to the task force—but these developments offer hope that the kinds of abuses that the DOJ described may soon become a thing of the past.

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