

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-milestone-for-new-yorks-juvenile-justice-reform>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Wednesdays announcement by New York Governor David Paterson that the state had reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to begin federal oversight of and introduce mental health services at four controversial juvenile placement facilities is a significant step toward change in New Yorks juvenile justice system.

Those of us at the Vera Institute of Justice who have worked with the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and [the Governors Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice](#) to research and analyze the systems flaws and craft a new model for responding to young people in trouble with the law applaud the promised actions. The agreed-upon reforms, which mirror some of the task force recommendations, are the latest developments in a climate of change that arose out of the task force and its recommendations.

Nevertheless, the problems in New York States juvenile justice system demand a rigorously systemic response and need to extend far beyond the four facilities investigated by the Department of Justice. A growing body of research shows that its both cheaper for the taxpayers and far more effective for kids and their communities to keep them out of prison-like institutions. In fact, the task force recommendations are aligned with this evidence-based research. Yet [the proposed FY 2011 executive budget](#), still languishing in Albany, slashes funds for community-based alternatives for juveniles while increasing funding for the very kinds of facilities that the Department of Justice investigated. Therefore, its critical that OCFS not only improve the services and the broader culture within all facilities, but that the state also continue to support and fund alternatives to confinement for youth who do not need to be locked up.

One important step in OCFS's ongoing push to introduce a therapeutic--rather than punitive--model of juvenile justice is asking for Vera's help in responding to the task force recommendations. At present, Vera's [Center on Youth Justice](#) (in partnership with the Missouri Youth Services Institute) is aiding the design and implementation of a pilot project in Brooklyn intended to keep kids near their communities and divert some currently in state custody to a non-residential day placement center. Dubbed the Brooklyn Initiative, the project draws on [lessons learned from Missouris juvenile justice reforms](#).

Vera takes pride in our role in moving the notion of juvenile justice reform in New York toward reality.

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