

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/in-a-step-toward-reform-los-angeles-county-severely-limits-segregation-for-youth>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The [Addressing the Overuse of Segregation in U.S. Prisons and Jails blog series](#) features the voices of various perspectives from corrections officials and academic experts to advocates and formerly incarcerated people examining the issues presented by the use of segregated housing and discussing promising strategies for reform.

Los Angeles County's juvenile justice system is not usually held up as a model of reform, as it is more publicly associated with [Department of Justice \(DOJ\) oversight and consent decrees](#). This week, however, Los Angeles County took a bold step in joining the growing list of jurisdictions county, state, and federal severely limiting the use of solitary confinement for youth. Solitary confinement for juveniles (sometimes called segregation or restrictive housing) typically involves placing children into small dark cells alone, often with only a plastic mattress, for hours, days, weeks, even months at a time. Recognizing that this practice is not only completely ineffective to modify behavior, but can actually create [serious psychological, physical, and developmental harm](#), the LA County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion to restrict its use, with the goal of eventually eliminating the practice.

Now, solitary may only be used as a temporary response to behavior that poses a serious and immediate risk of physical harm to any person, and requires that staff notify a mental health professional and make a decision about release within two hours. This language is identical to the [DOJ's new restrictive housing guidelines](#) policies Vera provided research and support for, through our [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative](#), to help jurisdictions reduce their reliance on segregation through the advancement of safe and effective alternatives.

This reform will have significant and immediate consequences for the approximately 1,200 youth in LA County's juvenile facilities, as solitary has been widely used throughout the system, often for vague disciplinary reasons. Recently, custody officials have placed even more young people into [solitary confinement](#) between 2014 and 2015, the number of referrals to restrictive housing units increased more than 50 percent.

The Board of Supervisors' actions this week put LA County on the right path toward meaningful and effective juvenile justice reform that will improve the health, safety, and well-being of our youth.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.