

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/the-value-of-keeping-parents-at-home>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

[Yesterdays coverage](#) of a Brooklyn, New York residential placement alternative for homeless mothers who committed felonies draws attention to an issue that is gaining traction during this difficult fiscal climate: the value of keeping families together.

Research shows that families provide emotional and material support to their loved ones who are incarcerated or sentenced. People who maintain relationships during incarceration do better while in prison as well as once they return to the community. Another option is to help prevent the disruption in families lives altogether and reduce the negative experiences of children, which is what several jurisdictions are trying to do.

[The Drew House](#), an initiative of the Brooklyn District Attorneys office, provides mothers with dependent children an alternative to incarceration and helps keep their children out of the foster care system while also providing substance abuse treatment or mental health services to support mothers long-term success. Research by Lorie S. Goshin and [Mary Byrne of Columbia University](#) found that the cost-effective program does not have a negative effect on public safety. Were we to calculate the benefits for the children in avoiding involvement in the child welfare system, the benefits would be even greater. The Washington State Corrections Department offers [a sentencing alternative for parents](#) that allows them to reside at home during their confinement. They are monitored electronically as well as by specialized parole officers who visit the home regularly. [The Douglas County, Kansas Sheriffs Office](#) uses weekend sentences to help people in jail maintain their jobs and housing. People serving these sentences live with their families during the week and serve their jail time over consecutive weekends.

By helping people stay connected to their families, criminal justice agencies can save money and lessen the emotional and financial impact of a jail or prison stay on children and families. With more research like the Columbia University study on these types of alternatives, the field can make more informed decisions about ways to promote public safety decisions that affect families and communities in the near and long-term.

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