

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/ending-segregation-for-incarcerated-adolescents-is-a-step-in-the-right-direction-for-nyc>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The New York City Department of Corrections (DOC) recent commitment to [ending the use of solitary confinement for juveniles](#) by the end of 2014 is an important change that recognizes the [particularly harmful](#) impact of segregation on adolescents (starkly illustrated in [this](#) report by the Board of Corrections).

The DOC's decision also recognizes that there are alternative ways to maintain order in our jails and prisons. While solitary confinement is especially harmful to still-developing young people, long-term segregation is similarly [detrimental](#) to adults, and furthermore, is [expensive](#).

Exploring how segregation is used can quickly lead to an even larger question: What do we want our departments of corrections to accomplish? Most of us will likely include the rehabilitation of offenders (or, in the case of a jail like New York's Rikers Island, defendants) in our response. But is our current system, with its nearly singular focus on more and tougher punishment, accomplishing that end?

If it is not, we need to provide our corrections officers with the tools and training necessary to facilitate actual *corrections* positive changes in incarcerated individuals. A trauma-informed focus on crisis intervention and non-violent de-escalation techniques can, in many cases, resolve disciplinary problems before they rise to a level requiring separation. Furthermore, modeling pro-social responses helps maintain an atmosphere of respect and safety, and can help equip prisoners with the skills they need to successfully return to their communities.

Vera's National Segregation Reduction and Alternatives Campaign, which will launch in the coming weeks, aims to assist state and local departments of corrections with evaluating their use of segregated housing and exploring safe and effective alternatives. Stay tuned for more information on this project.

The DOC has taken an important step with this decision, and we look forward to seeing the policies and implementation plans develop. Banning the use of solitary confinement for adolescents places New York City's jail at the forefront of a movement toward a national end to this harshest of punishments. But of course there is much, much more work that needs to be done to reduce senseless harms, in New York City, and across the country.

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