

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/state-would-cover-all-costs-of-raising-the-age-in-new-york>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Last month, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo [released his budget](#) for the coming fiscal year, including in it reforms to the states juvenile justice system that would remove most 16 and 17-year-olds from the adult criminal justice system without increasing costs at the local level.

Historically, county governments in New York have shared the cost of the juvenile justice system with the state, contributing 50 percent of the cost of confinement, and 90 percent of probation costs. Under the proposed budget, however, the [state would provide 100 percent reimbursement](#) to counties for the cost of serving 16 and 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system.

The governors proposal to [raise the age](#) of juvenile jurisdiction from 16 to 18 which has been met with wide support as New York would join a number of states that have recently reduced the number of minors prosecuted in the criminal justice system also includes a number of reforms that will reduce costs and lead to better outcomes for youth. For example, the proposed changes would prohibit anyone under 18 from being incarcerated in an adult jail or prison, increase the number of youth diverted from court proceedings, and reduce the number of low-risk, non-violent youth confined in costly youth detention or residential placement facilities.

In addition to assuming all of the costs of 16 and 17-year-olds, the state is cutting the local share of the cost for youth younger than 16 (that is, youth currently in juvenile jurisdiction) who are placed in residential facilities administered by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). The local share for this cost will be capped at \$55 million annually, resulting in \$425 million savings for counties over the next five years, effectively reducing the local share of OCFS placement costs for youth under age 16 from 50 percent to 20 percent. Although New York City is required to invest its share of savings in programs to assist the homeless population, other counties can use these savings any way they wish.

These savings at the local level would be crucial, as each dollar saved means more money for youth programs and other essential county services.

The financial benefits of the governors proposals for counties are important, but matters of justice and safety should not hinge on costs alone. The benefits of raising the age surely far exceed the costs. An analysis completed by the Governors Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice found that implementation of a range of evidence-based services used in juvenile justice for New Yorks population of 16 and 17-year-old offenders would eliminate between 1,500 and 2,400 crime victimizations every five years. Furthermore, the benefits of reform extend beyond safety: the governors proposals require police to contact parents if their child is being questioned and ensure that no child will ever spend the night in jail with adults.

For more information on the governors proposals, see the [Final Report of the Governors Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice](#), which provides details on the reforms. In addition, Part J of the governors [memorandum in support](#) of the budget bill provides a summary of the pending raise the age legislation.

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