



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - BRING YOUTH HOME: BUILDING ON OHIO'S YOUTH DEINCARCERATION LEADERSHIP

The research is clear. Incarcerating children in correctional facilities is not only expensive, but harmful to children and the communities where they live. In facilities, children can be subject to dangerous conditions, such as isolation, that can cause permanent damage. After release, they are less likely to succeed in school or jobs and more likely to reoffend. Based on this research, many jurisdictions have been moving towards serving youth less expensively and more effectively in their communities.

Ohio is leading the way. Since the 1990s, Ohio's Department of Youth Services (DYS) has implemented five state-based funding strategies to support local courts in reducing youth incarceration. These strategies have helped reduce Ohio's juvenile corrections population from 2,500 youth in 1992 to less than 500 youth today.

Ohio's five strategies are divided into two categories: 1) subsidy programs and 2) competitive programs. Ohio's two subsidy programs are RECLAIM – Ohio's most well-known initiative that uses a formula to incentivize courts to serve youth locally instead of sending them to correctional facilities – and the Youth Services grant (a population-based block grant to each of Ohio's counties).

But Ohio's deincarceration efforts do not end with RECLAIM, which is over two decades old. Ohio has continued to innovate with three new competitive program to reduce youth incarceration:

- **Behavioral Health and Juvenile Justice (BHJJ):** Evidence-based programs for youth ages 10-18, the majority of whom are moderate- to high-risk of reoffending, who have mental health and/or substance abuse challenges. Started in 2005, BHJJ serves an average of 250 youth/year. Outcomes include significantly lower recidivism rates than comparable youth; a decrease in trauma symptoms, substance use, and problem severity; and improved overall functioning and educational outcomes.
- **Targeted RECLAIM:** Evidence-based programs for youth adjudicated delinquent of felony offenses in counties with the highest number of youth sent to correctional facilities. Since 2009, Targeted RECLAIM counties have decreased their correctional facility admissions and youth who completed Targeted RECLAIM programs, particularly low-risk youth, were less likely to be incarcerated than youth who previously had served time in correctional facilities.
- **Competitive RECLAIM:** Started in 2015, outcome-driven programs to provide community-based alternatives to incarceration in three areas: 1) diversion programs for low-risk youth, 2) intervention programs for moderate- and high-risk youth, and 3) multicounty collaborations to increase in-home treatment options. Counties work with partners for technical assistance and quality assurance.

Key Findings. Ohio's deincarceration experience can inform other jurisdictions' conversations about developing new or reexamining existing deincarceration strategies. Key findings include:

Tailoring programs

Each of Ohio's competitive deincarceration initiatives target particular youth with programs that have been or can be shown to be effective with that particular population. To achieve the best possible outcomes, Ohio has moved toward a risk-based, rather than offense-based, approach.

Embracing research

Ohio's deincarceration initiatives have continued to adopt research on what works for youth in the juvenile justice system. Both BHJJ and Targeted RECLAIM require courts to choose from a specific menu of evidence-based programs, while Competitive RECLAIM allows more innovation by allowing programs to be research-supported, risk-focused, and outcome-based.

Tracking outcomes

Courts track data on youth served by each of Ohio's deincarceration programs, including demographics and recidivism rates. This information allows stakeholders to use data-based decision-making to achieve further population reductions in juvenile correctional facilities.

Prioritizing technical assistance

All of Ohio's programs provide some level of feedback or technical assistance from one or more entities to identify and address their jurisdiction's unique needs, measure success, ensure program fidelity, and create the most positive use or reinvestment of juvenile justice dollars for youth and communities.

Encouraging collaboration

Several of Ohio's initiatives require collaboration between courts and other stakeholders to meet the often complex needs of court-involved youth and to avoid duplicating efforts. For example, BHJJ grants are coordinated by local Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Services Boards, who work with the court and other local stakeholders to develop a continuum of care for youth.

Investing consistently

Overall, Ohio's deincarceration programs funding has been consistent for decades, continuously supporting community-based alternatives for youth who would otherwise be sent to Ohio's juvenile corrections facilities.

Balancing flexibility and parameters

Each local jurisdiction has unique strengths and needs that contribute to how youth are handled in the juvenile court system. Ohio's deincarceration programs provide a sliding scale of local control combined with parameters on how funding can be spent, which has helped promote partnerships between local courts and state agencies.

*The full report is accessible on the Juvenile Justice Coalition's website at www.jjohio.org.
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