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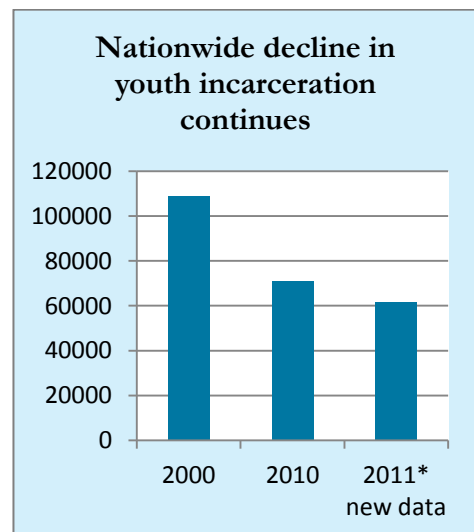
Making a Comeback for Kids: New Report Shows Increased Reduction in Youth Incarceration Nationwide

Highlights states working to achieve improved conditions for kids

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The number of youth confined in state and county facilities nationwide strongly declined in 2011, affirming the benefits of key juvenile-justice reforms enacted in various states in the past decade. These findings are included in a new report, [“The Comeback and Coming-from-Behind States”](#) released today by the [National Juvenile Justice Network](#) (NJJN) and the [Texas Public Policy Foundation’s Center for Effective Justice](#) (TPPF). The report highlights the continued positive trend in the nine states leading the nation on reducing incarceration, and showcases a handful of states that, while not keeping pace with the nationwide trend, have opened the door for future progress by adopting crucial incarceration-reducing policies that have been shown to improve conditions for youth and communities.

For the 2001-to-2011 ten-year period, the number of confined youth declined by 41% nationwide, or an annual average decline of 4.1% — a dramatic drop since 2000, when a record-setting 108,802 youth were held in detention centers awaiting trial or confined by the courts in juvenile facilities in the U.S. The nationwide decline in 2011 (from 70,793 to 61,423 youth) continues the trend from the previous year (the latest for which data is available), which showed youth confinement was reduced by 32% nationwide from 2001-2010.

The report also identifies four states — Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming — that are not keeping pace with the national rate of incarceration decline. As a group, these states’ average rate of confinement in 2011 was 87% higher than the national average. However they are poised to show progress in the coming years, as they have already begun to adopt specific policies proven to reduce incarceration.



The report argues that positive turnaround can be achieved through changes to state policy that reflect new understandings of the teenage brain, growing use of alternatives to incarceration, and constrained state budgets. These policy reforms include:

- increasing the availability of evidence-based alternatives to confinement;
- requiring intake procedures that reduce the use of detention facilities;
- closing or downsizing youth confinement facilities;
- reducing schools’ overreliance on the justice system to address discipline issues;
- disallowing incarceration for minor offenses; and
- restructuring juvenile justice responsibilities and finances among states and counties.

NJJN and TPPF identified these six policies as key measures of positive reform, as all encourage less reliance on detention and incarceration across the U.S.

“States should continue to look to innovative policy changes that emphasize holding youths accountable and rehabilitating them in the community instead of relying on incarceration. Proven community-based interventions will create safer neighborhoods, keep families together, and reduce the huge societal and economic costs of unnecessary youth confinement,” said Marc Levin, Director of the Center for Effective Justice at TPPF.

For youth being held in detention centers awaiting trial or incarcerated in juvenile facilities, implementing reforms is a critical change. Youth who are locked up are separated from their families, many witness violence and struggle when they get out, trying to complete high school, get jobs or go to college. Aside from the human toll, the financial costs of maintaining large secure facilities have also made it vital to rethink juvenile justice in every community.

“States have made strides in changing their policies so that youth are held accountable in age-appropriate ways, but there is more work to be done,” said Sarah Bryer, Director of NJJN. “It is critical that we build upon the success seen over the past twenty years and make every effort possible to adopt meaningful reforms that reduce youth confinement and strengthen our communities.”

Figure 4. Adoption of Incarceration-Reducing Policies Since 2001:
Coming-from-Behind and Comeback States Compared

State	Community Alternatives	Restrictions on Use of Detention	Facility Closings and Downsizing	Less Reliance on Law Enforcement for School Discipline	Not Confined for Minor Offenses	Realign, Reinvest Statewide
Nine Comeback States						
CA						
CT						
IL						
MS						
NY						
OH						
TX						
WA						
WI						
Four Coming-from-Behind States						
MO						
NE						
SD						
WY						

The report, an update to the [“Comeback States” report](#) issued by the groups in June, uses data from 2011 (the most recent year for which national data is available) on youth confinement provided by the U.S. Justice Department’s (USDOJ) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to track the ongoing national reduction of youth incarceration, as well as the continued progress of the nine states leading the nation on implementing meaningful juvenile justice reforms resulting in the reduction of youth in confinement in their states. These comeback states include: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Mississippi, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The nine comeback states were selected because they adopted at least two-thirds of the targeted policy changes, exceeded the national-average reduction in youth confinement, and experienced enhanced public safety with a decline in youth arrests. The four come-from-behind states were identified based on their current population-adjusted rates of youth confinement, and their adoption of at least three of the six incarceration-reducing statewide policies identified in the report.

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The National Juvenile Justice Network is made up of 43 juvenile justice coalitions and organizations in 33 states that advocate for state and federal laws, policies and practices that are fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate for all children, youth and families involved in—or at risk of becoming involved in—the justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.

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