

## Shreveport, LA - Shreveport Times

### Report: Louisiana an example in reducing juvenile incarceration

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Betty Bletz, probation officer with the Parish of Caddo Juvenile Services Department, talks with a 10-year-old girl at a local school during a routine visit in this January 2009 photo. The girl is in the system because of behavioral issues that were diagnosed after going to juvenile court. Greg Pearson/The Times / Greg Pearson/The Times



Written by  
**Kristi Johnston**



2nd Circuit Court of Appeal candidate David Matlock.

A new report shows Louisiana and four other states as the example in how to reduce juvenile confinement.

All five states in the Justice Policy Institute study released today had a 50 percent or more reduction in the number of juveniles incarcerated from 2001 to 2010.

Other states in the report were Connecticut, Tennessee, Minnesota and Arizona.

“Louisiana, of all the states that I looked at it, it was easier for it to make that decrease because it was in that bad of shape,” Spike Bradford, author of the “Common Ground” report, said. “To move down to 19 (from number three) is pretty good.”

Louisiana had nearly a 53 percent drop in the number of juvenile confinements going from a rate of 505 youth per 100,000 in 2001 to 239 in 2010.

Caddo Juvenile Chief Judge David Matlock said the drop is a combination of more diversion programs, which means less money spent housing juveniles and more money for those programs.

“We have a lot of local programs, like truancy, which help get to these kids sooner,” Matlock said, noting that the decline in local adult-committed crime is relative to that in the juvenile system.

The state had about 2,000 long-term secure placement beds for juveniles two years ago. Today it’s at less than 400, Matlock said.

“Aside from the lives that are changing, it’s just an enormous fiscal savings — about \$150 per day per child,” he said. “And Shreveport has been a portion largely driving those numbers.”

Each of the five states in the report had commonalities, including being the target of a class action lawsuit, the juvenile system being split from the adult system, improved agency collaboration and state leaders following the belief that juveniles require different interventions and services than adults.

“Louisiana ticks all the boxes,” Bradford said. “Most importantly when they realized they had to make changes after the lawsuit, they had a cultural change to treat kids developmentally differently and part of that is building up non-confinement community based programs.”

The lawsuit was filed in 1998 by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana and Department of Justice charging the Office of Youth Development with abusing and mistreating incarcerated juveniles. The suit was settled in 2000 and amended in 2003 and 2004.

## NEW YORK UPSTATE: NORTH COUNTRY GAZETTE Five States Reduce Youth Confinement

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WASHINGTON—Removing young people who engage in delinquent behavior from their homes and communities and incarcerating them in locked facilities is no longer the status quo in five states, according to two new reports released by the Justice Policy Institute.

***Juvenile Justice Reform in Connecticut: How Collaboration and Commitment Have Improved Public Safety and Outcomes for Youth*** and ***Common Ground: Lessons Learned from Five States that Reduced Juvenile Confinement by More than Half***, shed light on the pronounced trend

toward reduced confinement of youth nationwide. Through a variety of methods, the reports find, **Connecticut, Arizona, Minnesota, Louisiana,** and **Tennessee** all reduced youth confinement by more than 50 percent between 2001 and 2010, with no resulting uptick in juvenile crime.



A deeper look at Connecticut's juvenile justice system reforms shows that, through a system-wide culture change and major investments in evidence-based services, a previously wasteful, punitive, ineffective, and often abusive juvenile justice system was transformed into a national model, at no additional cost to taxpayers (after adjusting for inflation).

Combined with a [\*data snapshot\*](#) showing state-by-state youth incarceration rates that is also being released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the two JPI reports put the trend toward reduced confinement of youth in context and offer lessons that reformers in other jurisdictions can adapt and use in their own communities.

“The success across these diverse states in reducing the number of youth in confinement shows that there is no reason other states can't halve their populations as well,” said **Peter Leone, PhD., acting executive director of the Justice Policy Institute**. “And the fact that some of the highlighted states made progress without a major realignment in funding means that economic factors should not be an excuse to avoid reform efforts.”

*Juvenile Justice Reform* in Connecticut highlights the past two decades of Connecticut's successful efforts to improve responses to youth who engage in delinquent behavior and to reduce the number of youth placed into detention centers, correctional training schools, and/or other residential facilities. Specifically, the state reduced residential commitments from 680 in 2000 to 216 in 2011 (nearly 70 percent), even though most 16 year olds, who were previously treated as adults, are now handled in the juvenile system. The state has also closed one of its three state-operated detention centers, and reduced the under 18 population in Connecticut's adult prisons from 403 in January 2007 to 151 in July 2012. Meanwhile, Connecticut expanded its investment in evidence-based, family-focused adolescent treatment programs from \$300,000 in 2000 to \$39 million in 2009.

For decades, Connecticut was one of only three states that prosecuted and punished all 16 and 17 year olds as adults. In 2007, the state enacted historic legislation to 'raise the age' of juvenile jurisdiction from 16 to 18, effective January 1, 2010 for 16 year olds and July 1, 2012 for 17 year olds. Even before 17 year olds became eligible for juvenile court on July 1, 2012, the new law had enabled 8,325 16 year olds to avoid prosecution and punishment in the adult criminal justice system. In addition, Connecticut has outlawed detention for youth accused of status offenses (like truancy and running away from home) that would not be illegal if committed by adults, and created a new treatment system to keep nearly all status offenders out of the court system entirely.

“I’ve always believed that while standing up for kids in the juvenile justice system isn’t always politically popular, it’s incredibly important. Connecticut should be proud of its unyielding commitment to improving the system to keep our most vulnerable youth safe and give them a second chance,” said **Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT)**, a champion of juvenile justice reform. “By taking bold steps that put kids and evidenced-based policies first, Connecticut has become a nationwide model for reform.”

The second report, *Common Ground: Lessons Learned from Five States that Reduced Juvenile Confinement by More than Half*, explores the drivers of youth prison population reductions in Connecticut, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arizona and Minnesota- and provides insights for other states inspired to improve their juvenile justice systems.

“These states have taken advantage of circumstances, both good and bad, to reshape their juvenile systems away from the over-use of confinement and towards recognition that young people are different from adults; the reasons that put them in contact with the justice system are different and the way we respond to their behavior should be different,” said **Spike Bradford, JPI senior research associate and author** of *Common Ground*.

*Common Ground* makes the following recommendations to policymakers and service providers in other states looking to reform their juvenile justice systems:

- **Recognize opportunities to push change.** The top performing states capitalized on falling arrest rates, budget shortfalls and litigation-driven reforms to shift their systems from confinement.
- **Consider the legal route.** Many of the most effective reform movements have begun through the process of settling litigation. If conditions are poor and a case can be made, advocacy organizations have it in their power to kick-start reform by bringing a suit against the state.
- **Create/re-energize existing juvenile justice commissions/task forces to promote collaboration among stakeholders.** These cross-system groups can ensure that litigation is truly a “call to action” and that there is buy-in from those decision makers who could push forward reforms.

- **Collect useful and reliable data and make it accessible.** Progress can only be confirmed through measurement, so states should ensure that all agencies keep relevant data that enable them to track changes and make adjustments accordingly.
- **Utilize experts for technical assistance.** Initiatives such as the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change project and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) are designed to help states coordinate reform and tailor it to their unique situation.

**Promote a return to the American juvenile justice ideal of treating young people in trouble differently than adults and with therapeutic interventions rather than harsh punishment.**

### **Hartford, Connecticut – Hartford Courant State Cuts Number of Children in Juvenile Jail Report Says Alternative Programs Are Effective, Cost-Efficient**



The courtyard was a 58,000 square foot addition to the Hartford Juvenile Detention Center in 2004. (Courant File Photo / January 5, 2004)

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Once a state that poured tens of millions of dollars into its juvenile prison, Connecticut is now locking up far fewer children and beefing up community programs – with no uptick in serious, violent juvenile crime, a justice-system reform group reported today.

The state Department of Children and Families has shifted money from locked-residential facilities to neighborhood programs and foster care, and is getting a better return on taxpayer dollars as a result, the Justice Policy Institute reported.

Advocates in Connecticut said while there's still plenty of work to do – particularly concerning differences in the way the system handles black children and white children – this shift away from detention centers and locked wards represents major reform.

"We've come a long way, and it only makes sense to keep going," said Abby Anderson, executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, based in Bridgeport. "We've shifted to a more rehabilitative model – but we're still holding kids accountable."

One year in the \$57 million Connecticut Juvenile Training School in Middletown costs about \$350,000 per child, far more than a year in foster care or in a treatment program that diverts kids from juvenile court.

Justice-system and child-welfare officials acknowledge that the focus on alternative programs has raised the threshold for locking up juvenile offenders in Connecticut. For example, there is more tolerance than there used to be for technical violations of probation and parole, such as curfew infractions, truancy, problems in school, and failed drug tests. But the officials say that in the long run, treatment programs still produce better outcomes than prison for young offenders.

"There is a higher threshold (for juvenile lock-ups), but we think it's the right policy," said William H. Carbone, head of the Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division. "All of the indicators are going in the right direction: the recidivism rate is down and the completion rate for the treatment programs is up."

"There was a time when we had zero tolerance for violations," Carbone continued. "A kid could be returned to jail for missing school. Well, what did that accomplish, other than helping the kid form relationships with more hardened kids? And it doesn't improve the school behavior. What happened was it increased the likelihood that the kid would just go further into the system."

Carbone said probation officers now use a system of "graduated sanctions," meaning they'll counsel young offenders or confine them to their house before applying for a violation-of-probation warrant and sending them back to juvenile court.

Joette Katz, the commissioner of DCF, noted that legislative leaders as well as officials of the Judicial Branch, are committed to supporting "community-based solutions that are effective in helping children."

Katz said decisions about jailing young offenders still "have to be made on an individual basis."

But she added, "Connecticut has decided that, overall, youths will have a better chance to develop into successful adults if they receive services in the community as opposed to institutional settings."

The Washington D.C.-based justice policy group said Connecticut, Minnesota, Arizona, Louisiana, and Tennessee are states that are relying less on jail cells and more on treatment programs and foster care to try to turn around delinquent kids.

The Connecticut DCF cut residential commitments from 680 in 2000 to 216 last year, a drop of almost 70 percent, the justice institute reported.

The reduction in juvenile confinement comes even as the Connecticut juvenile system is expanding. The juvenile court now takes in most 16-year-olds who would have been tried as adults before the state adopted its "raise the age" legislation in 2007.

The under-18 population in Connecticut's adult prisons dropped from 403 in January 2007 to 151 in July 2012, the justice institute reported.

At the same time, the Connecticut DCF expanded its public investment in "family-focused, adolescent treatment programs" from \$300,000 in 2000 to \$39 million in 2009, the institute reported.

Until recently, Connecticut was one of only three states that prosecuted all 16 and 17 year-olds as adults. The "raise the age" law extended juvenile jurisdiction from 16 to 18, except for those accused of the most serious violent crimes.

Anderson, speaking last year at a justice conference hosted by U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, cited the shift away from juvenile jail.

"Even with the addition of the 16-year-olds, the number of youth entering the juvenile court is significantly smaller than it was in the mid-2000s – 20 percent smaller," Anderson testified. "In fact, commitments to our training school in 2011, two years into 'Raise the Age,' were at their lowest level in years. And the outcomes? While Judicial Branch recidivism rates are falling across the board, the outcomes for the 16-year-olds are the best."

Connecticut has also stopped jailing youths accused of "status offenses" – behavior such as truancy and running away. Instead, DCF and the court system have created a treatment network that has diverted most status offenders from court, the justice institute said.

Anderson said the next task is to reduce racial disparity in the system.

She said young black males in detention centers take longer to place in foster families or residential centers than young white males, and black high school students are four times more likely to be arrested at school than white students. Hispanic students are three times more likely to be arrested in school than whites, Anderson said.

She said, however, that the annual number of school-based arrests is beginning to decrease, as more emphasis is placed on alternative measures.