

PRESS RELEASE

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National Collaboration for Youth Releases Roadmap, Calls on Policymakers to Invest in Community-based Alternatives to Youth Incarceration

***Beyond Bars: Keeping Young People Safe at Home and Out of Youth Prisons* outlines steps for ending the youth-prison model and overhauling juvenile justice systems nationwide.**

WASHINGTON – [The National Collaboration for Youth](#) (NCY), a coalition of national organizations committed to advocating with and on behalf of youth, today released a roadmap for reform and called on state and local policymakers, juvenile justice administrators, and judges to end the practice of youth incarceration and instead invest in community-based alternatives: *Beyond Bars: Keeping Young People Safe at Home and Out of Youth Prisons*.

Within the United States, 51,000 young people are incarcerated in youth prisons or other out-of-home placement in the juvenile justice system on any given day. *Beyond Bars* calls for a new, more effective approach to public safety, one that places a renewed emphasis on programs and services designed to meet the needs of young people in their homes and families as an alternative to the outdated youth prison model.

Overwhelming evidence shows that youth prisons are harmful, ineffective and excessively expensive. Youth in prison are routinely subjected to maltreatment – including solitary confinement and physical abuse – which can exacerbate trauma, limit learning, and lead to future recidivism. With this guide, NCY aims to help communities hold young people accountable while also restoring a sense of belonging for them and their families.

“With the right investments, communities are the best places for our young people to explore their strengths, get the help they need and ultimately thrive,” said Jeff Fleisher, Chair of the National Collaboration for Youth and CEO of [Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.](#) “Implementing a vast array of services in the community can keep young people from being arrested while remaining close to their support systems.”

As states throughout the country begin to take steps toward reforming their juvenile justice systems, *Beyond Bars* lifts up solutions for keeping communities safe while placing an emphasis on rehabilitation over incarceration. The guide calls for:

- Identifying community strengths and assets in order to keep youth in conflict with the law in their own neighborhoods, instead of isolated in youth incarceration facilities far away from their families.

- Reducing ethnic and racial disparities in the juvenile justice system by providing culturally competent, neighborhood-based programs.
- More investments in services tailored to address the individual needs of each family and child, such as local mental and behavioral health centers, substance abuse programs, and victim services
- Soliciting input from impacted youth and their families when devising alternatives.
- Providing justice-involved youth with access to good schools, after-school programs, jobs, and opportunities to learn, grow, and develop in safe environments.

“Research has shown that a one-size fits all approach to meeting the needs of justice-involved youth is ineffective,” said [Hernan Carvente](#), a program analyst at Vera’s Center on Youth Justice who focuses on including youth and family partnerships in juvenile justice reforms efforts. “The more we focus on meeting the unique needs of each individual, the better we ensure their long-term success and contribute to the strengthening of our communities.”

According to the guide, a lack of full services in communities is often used as justification to incarcerate a young person, even when it would be otherwise unnecessary. There is mounting evidence that confinement does not work for the vast majority of young people, and actually increases a youth’s likelihood of being re-arrested.

“States devote the largest share of their juvenile justice resources to youth incarceration and spend a very small portion of their budgets on nonresidential community-based programs,” said Clinton Lacey, Director of the [District of Columbia Youth Rehabilitation Services](#) (DYRS). “We can’t expect better outcomes for our kids and our communities so long as we’re more invested in beds and bars than in families and neighborhoods – our priorities must change.”

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The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) is the longest-standing coalition of national organizations committed to advocating with and on behalf of youth and, in particular, in research-driven “positive youth development.” To learn more, visit: <http://www.collab4youth.org/>.

Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (YAP) is a nationally recognized, nonprofit organization exclusively committed to the provision of community-based alternatives to out-of-home care through direct service, advocacy and policy change. To learn more, visit: <http://www.yapinc.org/>.

The Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) is responsible for the supervision, custody, and care of young people convicted with a delinquent act in the District .They work with community partners and juvenile justice experts to implement innovative, research-based models that are in line with best practices in the juvenile justice and youth development fields. To learn more, visit: <http://dyrs.dc.gov/>.