

Getting Juvenile Justice Right in New York

Proven Interventions Will Cut Crime and Save Money

The good news is that, nationally, **6 in 10 juveniles brought before a juvenile court for the first time will not return to court** on another charge. However, some youth come back repeatedly. Too many New York juveniles are well on their way to becoming chronic, violent criminals. One study looked at those New York juvenile delinquents whose crimes were serious enough or frequent enough that they had been placed in state custody. It found disturbing results: “For males and females combined, **75 percent were arrested [again] for a felony or misdemeanor**, and 42 percent were arrested for a violent felony.”

Nothing will make juvenile crime totally disappear. But research from Missouri, Ohio and elsewhere shows that, if fully implemented, **the reforms New York State is beginning to put in place can eliminate 4 out of 10 or more of the repeat crimes** now committed by juvenile delinquents.

What the Research Shows

Research has identified several effective approaches that help young delinquents avoid committing additional crimes. Here’s what works:

1. The most serious and troubled juveniles in custody need effective interventions to become productive citizens instead of career criminals.

Missouri found that by moving teens who need confinement from large, impersonal institutions to smaller facilities and helping them learn to control their anti-social behaviors, reconviction rates within three years of release could be cut **40 percent below the rates experienced in New York State**.

In Wisconsin, seriously troubled juveniles who did not receive a specialized mental health intervention while in custody were **three times more likely than similar youths to commit violent crimes** when released.

Chicago found that, when its most dangerous violent offenders returned home to one high-crime area of the city after serving their sentences, a carrot-and-stick program helped **cut homicides in those neighborhoods by almost 40 percent**. This approach combines increased law enforcement supervision of the offenders, expedited return to custody if needed, and expedited access to jobs, substance abuse treatment or other services. The same approach has worked with juveniles in Boston, Philadelphia and many other cities.

2. Use intensive foster care as an alternative to lock-up for less dangerous juveniles.

Many delinquents in custody who are not in high-security lock-up would re-offend less if placed in intensive foster care. Strict, specially-trained, foster parents ensure these medium-risk teens learn how to avoid criminal behavior while their parents are being trained to use the same methods to keep their children on track and away from crime when they leave foster care and return home. Research shows this approach can **cut new crimes in half**. There are currently 30 intensive foster care homes in the Bronx and 20 upstate. Hundreds more are needed.

3. Combine community sanctions with effective interventions as an alternative to out-of-home placement for many youth.

Many young delinquents committing serious or repeated crimes may not need placement outside the home. Along with the typical sanctions the courts are likely to impose on them, such as probation, curfews, and community service, if the troubled youth receive proven interventions, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Family Therapy, that effectively change their negative patterns of behavior the youth can be diverted from expensive custody and still commit fewer new crimes than if they are placed in custody. Those approaches, beginning to be used throughout New York, teach young people becoming involved in crime the social skills they need to sharply reduce further aggression, substance abuse or other criminal behavior.

4. Reduce pretrial detention for low-risk juveniles following arrest.

Data show that nationwide six out of 10 teens brought before courts are unlikely ever to return on new charges, yet many of them wind up being held in pretrial detention. ***One way to help finance effective interventions for juveniles who are more violent or chronic criminals is to reduce the unnecessary—and expensive—warehousing in pretrial detention of arrested young people who are not a high risk to their communities.*** This can be accomplished by using evidence-based screening tools coupled with alternative interventions. New York City and some upstate counties have already begun reforming how they handle children brought in for running away or other charges that would not be crimes if committed by adults.

5. Collect data and increase accountability.

Florida and Washington State systematically collect data on juvenile and adult repeat offending and use that data to increase accountability in their states. ***New York needs the legal framework and funding to support similar data collection and analysis so policymakers will have the information they need to replace failing approaches with effective efforts that cut crime.***

Save Money by Cutting Crime

Analysis shows that research-based approaches for cutting juvenile aggression and substance abuse problems reduce current custody costs and future crime so much they can save an average of \$15,000 to \$75,000 per delinquent. RECLAIM Ohio redirected moderate-risk juvenile delinquents to community sanctions and interventions. Those left out of the interventions offended 5 times more often, costing on average \$47,000 more per delinquent. New York City reported that, in 2005, its initial efforts to redirect youth had already saved \$18 million simply by cutting the number of youths in state custody. The real savings will come from cutting future juvenile and adult crime because the criminal justice costs for juvenile and adult crime in New York State is over \$4 billion every year, and that figure does not begin to account for the costs to victims.

Making New York Safer

The 300-plus members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York are convinced by the research and their own experience that change is necessary. They are discouraged that they are arresting a few kids over and over again. The most important message is probably the simplest: when deciding how to invest wisely in stopping juvenile crime use science, data collection, and accountability to guide policy. Investing in what really works to prevent crime will produce both huge savings and safer streets.

For references, see the full report at www.fightcrime.org



3 Columbia Place, Ste 200 • Albany, NY 12207 • 518.465.5462 • Fax 518.465.5476