

RISE for Youth

What Stakeholders Can Do to Transform Virginia's Juvenile Justice System



About RISE (Re-Invest in Supportive Environments) for Youth

Since October 2015, the Re-Invest in Supportive Environments (RISE) for Youth Campaign Coalition has strived to reduce the number of youth in Virginia involved in the juvenile justice system, and increase the number of evidence-informed community-based programs and placements.

The RISE for Youth Campaign Coalition is grounded in principles that will help Virginia positively move forward on juvenile justice:

- We believe the current juvenile justice system’s use of large juvenile prisons does not make our communities safer or rehabilitate our youth, and the current system does not use best practices to put youth on a path toward law-abiding lives.
- We believe the juvenile justice system should prioritize the individual therapeutic treatment needs of youth rather than rely on methods that increase the likelihood of future crime and incarceration.
- We believe a continuum of evidence-informed community services for youth will improve the lives of children and the safety of all citizens of the Commonwealth.
- We believe the juvenile justice system should strive to keep youth at home with their families with appropriate services and supports, and youth should only be removed from home as a last resort. When youth are removed, the system should keep them as close to their families and support network as possible.
- We believe the juvenile justice system should be transparent and actively engage youth, families, victims, and community supporters in the development of a plan grounded in rehabilitation and restorative justice.

United Families, Safe Communities

Executive Summary

“The young people who rack up million-dollar tabs behind bars, and the many more we spend hundreds of thousands to incarcerate, generally get the message: that they are at once disposable and dangerous- worth little to cultivate but anything to contain” — Nell Bernstein “Burning Down the House” (2014)

Virginia is at a moment of true opportunity. The Governor, the Director of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and members of the General Assembly agree that the current large juvenile prison model is outdated, costly, and ineffective at rehabilitating youth. Why is there bipartisan consensus around this issue? Because the outcomes for youth incarcerated and leaving Virginia’s juvenile prisons are unacceptable and unsustainable for the Commonwealth.

- In 2015, **78.3%** of youth were re-arrested within **36 months** of being released from a juvenile prison in Virginia.¹
- A young person in Virginia who was incarcerated for more than **15 months** was **44.3%** more likely to be re-arrested within a year after release than a juvenile whose sentence was 10 months or shorter.²
- In 2015, the Commonwealth spent **\$142,000** to incarcerate one youth for one year in a juvenile prison.³
- African American youth make up about **20%** of Virginia’s general population, but account for **43%** of all juvenile intakes, **56%** of all juvenile detainment, and an astonishing **67%** of commitments.⁴
- In 2015, **28.2%** of youth in juvenile prison passed their English Standards of Learning (SOL) test, and only **7.2%** passed their mathematics SOL test.⁵ In the state of Virginia, **79%** of all students passed their English and Mathematics SOLs.⁶

These outcomes must be improved to secure the future of Virginia's communities

During the 2016 session of the General Assembly, there was significant forward movement around juvenile justice. Governor McAuliffe proposed and the General Assembly agreed to allow DJJ to retain savings from the downsizing or closure of Virginia's large juvenile prisons.⁷ The retained savings will be re-invested into alternative placements and community services for youth who are committed to DJJ.

The General Assembly also mandated the creation of a task force to study the future of juvenile prisons in Virginia.⁸ Without waiting for the task force to convene its first meeting, however, the General Assembly approved funding to build a new juvenile prison in Chesapeake, Virginia.⁹

This report is about how Virginia can avoid repeating the mistakes of the past by re-imagining secure confinement and re-investing in supportive environments for youth. The report contains recommendations for DJJ, the Task Force on Juvenile Correctional Centers, and communities across the state.

This effort requires transparency, partnership, the inclusion of evidence-based programs and practices for youth, and, most importantly, participation from the experts on this issue: youth and families directly impacted by the juvenile justice system.

Virginia is at a critical tipping point in its history of rehabilitating youth and securing public safety. As a Commonwealth, we can choose to cultivate our children who have made mistakes into law-abiding citizens, or we can contain them until they become the criminals that prisons are meant to hold. This report is a call for every stakeholder to "RISE for Youth" to support our children, keep families together, and keep communities safe.

Recommendations

What the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) can do to RISE for Youth

- Give impacted youth, families, and advocates the opportunity to have meaningful input in the development of Virginia’s future juvenile justice system and secure facilities.
- Implement evidence-informed community alternatives that promote positive youth development and emphasize support, accountability, therapy and relationship building.
- Close Beaumont and Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Centers and prevent them from being used as facilities for children in the future.

What the Task Force on Juvenile Correctional Centers can do to RISE for Youth

- Recruit diverse and directly impacted community members to serve as members of the Task Force.
- Maintain an open and transparent process through the year that the Task Force convenes.
- Think outside of the traditional prison model when moving forward on any new construction. Consider implementing a “Missouri Model” of facilities across the Commonwealth. This model includes small (25 bed or fewer) facilities, located in communities that keep youth close to their families, and are in renovated spaces that are not traditional prison facilities.

What Community Members can do to RISE for Youth

- Support and speak out in favor of evidence-informed programs and placements for youth in Virginia.
- Meet with local legislators and elected officials to encourage them to “RISE for Youth,” and hold them accountable when their decisions result in more youth being incarcerated.
- Mentor, hire, and train youth who are at-risk or have been in contact with the juvenile justice system in order to reduce their likelihood of recidivism.

What the Department of Juvenile Justice can do to RISE for Youth

1. Give impacted youth, families, and advocates the opportunity to have meaningful input in the development of Virginia's future juvenile justice system and secure facilities.

Impacted youth, families, and advocates are critical stakeholders in understanding how to truly transform Virginia's juvenile justice system. Impacted youth and families are experts on what works, and what does not work for their lives and communities.

DJJ should make a concerted effort to include impacted youth, families, and advocates as decision makers in determining the future of juvenile justice. There are gaps in services, unforeseen challenges, and simple fixes that are often missed by individuals who do not experience the system in some way on a daily basis. Making sure youth, families, and advocates are invited and welcome to be a part of the decision making process would be a step forward. Holding focus groups, public town halls, and supporting the formation of an ongoing group for parents of youth who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated are other ways to ensure vital expertise is incorporated into DJJ's decision making.

2. Implement evidence-informed community alternatives that promote positive youth development and emphasize support, accountability, therapy and relationship building.

The General Assembly and the Governor support DJJ retaining savings from the closure of its juvenile prisons for the creation of more community-based alternatives for youth who are committed to DJJ.

DJJ has confirmed that Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center, one of Virginia's two remaining large juvenile prisons, will close in 2017.¹⁰ The operational costs for Beaumont in FY 2015 were nearly \$30-million dollars.¹¹ A \$30-million-dollar investment in community-based alternatives could serve many more justice-involved youth more effectively than our current prison model. DJJ is making positive strides toward building a continuum of

evidence-informed community alternatives. They are in the process of hiring regional service coordinators who will contract, oversee, and help maintain a continuum of more robust community programming for committed youth throughout the state. As DJJ is selecting community service providers, there should be an emphasis not only on implementing evidence informed alternatives, but also building capacity in local communities to sustainably serve “high risk” youth.

Studies by John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center and other research entities have concluded that many “high risk” youth can be appropriately and safely served in the community.¹² The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) defines “high-risk” youth as those with present or past juvenile justice involvement.

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc., Multi-systemic Therapy, Treatment Foster Care Oregon (formerly known as Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care), and Functional Family Therapy are a few examples of effective community-based programs for high-risk youth.¹³

The Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. is a 40-year old non-profit that serves young people in 90 communities across the country.¹⁴ Its model is family and youth driven with advocates from the community serving in a support role. The **John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center** found that **86%** of the 3,523 young people served by Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. remained arrest free while participating in programming. **93%** remained living at home at the end of services.¹⁵ Another study by the Research and Evaluation Center of **1,851 youth** in the program who were in the juvenile justice system for everything from status offenses to felonies, found that six to twelve months after completing the program, 95% were living at home in their communities.¹⁶ Compare that low recidivism rate to DJJ’s most recent rate for youth leaving juvenile prisons.

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. Elements of Effective Community-Based Programs

- Accept all kids: "no reject" policies
- Be available, accessible and flexible
- Empower voice, choice and ownership
- Individualize services for each youth
- Ensure family-focused services
- Take a strengths-based approach
- Provide culturally competent services
- Engage youth in the work
- Prioritize safety and crisis planning
- Create opportunities for civic engagement & giving back
- Cultivate long-term connection to community

In FY 2015, 49.1% of youth were re-arrested and 44% were reconvicted within one year of leaving a prison.¹⁷

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is an intensive family and community-based intervention to support justice-involved youth. The program promotes positive social interactions within the family setting and community setting. Families participate in intensive 3 to 5-month therapy where a counselor works to improve the youth's functioning in family, school, and community environments.¹⁸ The therapist supports the family by implementing social and coping skills when the youth and family encounter adverse circumstances. The program can significantly reduce delinquency and out of home placements. Specifically, sites around the country have noted significant decreases in recidivism with MST. In a study conducted in Missouri there were 70% fewer arrests among youth who had recidivated in the past.¹⁹

Treatment Foster Care Oregon (formerly known as Multidimensional Foster Care) The Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) program was developed to target youth with chronic antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance and delinquency.²⁰ The TFCO program recruits and trains families to provide the youth with intensive treatment and supervision. Families enact clear rules and guidelines with follow up consequences, provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior and an adult mentor. Within the program TFCO families facilitate a three-point level system that allows for daily feedback, along with accountability in home and in school. The more points the youth accumulates the more flexibility they are offered within the TFCO family. Modeled after the social learning theory, the program looks to emphasize and teach positive interpersonal skills. In a study comparing similarly situated justice-involved boys, youth in TFCO were incarcerated 60% fewer days in 12 months, has fewer subsequent arrests, and fewer referrals for violent offenses two years after enrolling in program.²¹

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is a short-term program that engages families and acts as a juvenile justice diversion program. It has been evaluated for over 38 years, and has demonstrated improvements for youth and their families. Licensed clinicians work with families for approximately 30 hours to improve communication and support within the family, while attempting to decrease negativity and dysfunctional patterns of behavior. Implementation of FFT has resulted in reduced reoffending, reduction of juvenile court involvement for siblings within the family, and reduced recidivism of the justice-involved youth.²²

These intensive community-based alternatives provide an individualized, holistic care approach to working with high and complex need youth and families within their homes and communities. They are deeply rooted in the principle of family involvement in which the family's perspectives and preferences drive services from start to end. The approach of programs like the Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. for example, emphasizes the importance of individualized, culturally competent and strength-based services that engage natural supports and occur within the community.

In addition to incorporating these key elements of effective community-based programs, DJJ should collect positive youth development outcomes on these programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of the youth and the Commonwealth. Service providers in these programs should be able to form a peer-to-peer network to provide support and insight on the most effective practices in working with youth. Finally, oversight of these programs should be through a statewide independent ombudsman, who can objectively evaluate what is working and what is not working and report on challenges to address, and successes to replicate.

Not only are these programs more effective at reducing recidivism, but also studies have shown they are more cost effective than prisons.

What is Positive Youth Development?

Positive Youth Development is using a “strength-based, resilience oriented perspective on adolescence” as opposed to a “deficit-based approach to adolescence focused on what can go wrong in a young person’s development.” Deficit-based outcomes are: high school dropout, academic failure, re-arrest, etc. Positive Youth Development outcomes include diploma completion, completion of a job training program, obtaining a certificate or license.

"Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development", Jeffrey Butts, Gordon Bazemore, Aundra Saa Meroe, Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

Community-Based Programs v. Secure Facilities

Program/Placement	Average Length of Treatment	Costs
Juvenile Prison in Virginia	16.7- 17.4 months +	\$198,299.98- \$206,611.95 (FY 2015) per youth ²³
Functional Family Therapy*	3 months	\$2,800 per youth & family ²⁴
Multisystemic Therapy*	4 months	\$7,068 per youth & family ²⁵
Treatment Foster Care Oregon* (also known as Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care)	7.5 months	\$43,242 per youth in 7.5 months or \$69,187.20 per youth in 1 year. ²⁶

+ Average length of stay for indeterminate and determinate/blended sentence youth in FY 2015.

* Costs calculation is from Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. www.blueprintsprograms.com

3. Close Beaumont and Bon Air and prevent them from being used as facilities for children in the future.

Nationally, large juvenile prisons have been recognized as generally ineffective programs.²⁷ These facilities are often “based on control, discipline, fear, surveillance, and punishment.”²⁸ In addition to the negative culture prevalent in these facilities, the physical plants also look and feel cold, isolating, unwelcoming, and sterile, with little access to nature. Beaumont and Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Centers both follow the large juvenile prison model with capacity to house 282 youth and 267 youth, respectively.²⁹ As a result, the negative outcomes for youth leaving these facilities have also followed the negative outcomes of that model.

The Department has taken important steps toward re-investing in supportive environments for youth as alternatives to Beaumont and Bon Air. Since May of 2014, the population in Virginia’s juvenile prisons has fallen by 37% while the population in alternatives to those prisons has tripled. In that time, DJJ has contracted for an eight-bed apartment living program, awarded a contract for an alternative residential placement for girls, and contracted for seven programs in local detention homes (called “Community Placement Programs”) for boys and one for girls with a total of 73 beds across the state.



In order to ensure a commitment to community-based alternatives to incarceration, when Beaumont and Bon Air are closed, there should be a commitment by the Governor, the Department, and its Director to never use Beaumont or Bon Air to hold youth committed to the Department. These facilities are not conducive to rehabilitation, and therefore should not be used to hold youth in the future in the interest of public safety.

What the Task Force on Juvenile Correctional Centers can do to RISE for Youth

1. Recruit diverse and directly impacted community members to serve as members of the Task Force.

The membership of the Task Force should reflect the diverse stakeholders who would be impacted by the Task Force's decision to build new facilities for committed youth. According to DJJ's 2015 Data Resource Guide, 67.2% of incarcerated youth are African American³⁰ even though African Americans make up only 23% of the school-aged population in Virginia.³¹ The highest committing communities to Virginia's juvenile prisons are Newport News and Norfolk in Hampton Roads.³² Despite the disproportionate representation of African Americans and youth from Hampton Roads in Virginia's current juvenile prisons, the Task Force does not reflect either perspective. There are no parents of youth in the juvenile system on the Task Force, nor are their formerly incarcerated youth. Moving forward, recruiting diverse and directly impacted youth and families to serve as members of the Task Force will be key to transforming the system in a way that reflects the needs and feedback of those most impacted by new juvenile facilities.

2. Maintain an open and transparent process through the year that the Task Force convenes.

Meetings of the Task Force should remain open and transparent through July 2017 when the final report is submitted to the General Assembly. The public should be given reasonable notice of the meeting dates, times, and locations, preferably two to three weeks in advanced of convening the meeting. The meeting locations and times should be accessible for the public. For example, some meetings should be held outside of normal business hours so that families who cannot attend during business hours can contribute to the discussion. Both the interim and final report of the Task Force should be publicly accessible for review and accountability purposes.

3. Think outside of the traditional prison model when moving forward on any new construction. Consider implementing a “Missouri Model” of facilities across the Commonwealth. This model includes small (approximately 30 bed) facilities, located in communities that keep youth close to their families, and are in renovated spaces that are not traditional prison facilities.

The charge of the Task Force is to consider the future need for secure juvenile correctional centers in Virginia. While the Virginia Code requires secure juvenile correctional centers, the model for these facilities does not have to be a traditional adult large prison model. Instead, Virginia should align its model to best practices and implement effective elements of nationally recognized and researched models like the “Missouri Model.”

a. The Missouri Model

In Core Principles for Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System, a national report sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “large, overcrowded, juvenile correctional facilities” is listed as a “commonly used but generally ineffective program and practice.”

Nationally, there has been movement around small, regional facilities that allow for individualized knowledge of a youth’s background and family, and tailored treatment to address his or her needs. Facilities of this type and size are run effectively in other communities. Missouri’s juvenile facilities are considered the best models of secure facilities.

Missouri Models Six Premises

- 1** — Youth stay in small regional facilities close to their family;
- 2** — Youth are given on-going treatment in small groups and there is a rigorous group therapy and living component;
- 3** — Healthy relationships between youth and their peers and staff and youth are a priority and these are achieved through group intervention rather than prison like coercive techniques;
- 4** — Youth have the opportunity to work towards their academic and career goals in order to stay on the right track after their release;
- 5** — Families are partners in treatment and planning; and
- 6** — Planning for reentry begins at entry and reentry support follows released youth into their communities

Richard A. Mendel, The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders (2010)

In a 2010 report authored by Richard A. Mendel for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Missouri Model was described as “a promising alternative” that offered “a far more humane, constructive, and positive approach” to addressing delinquent behavior by:

- Eschewing large institutions in favor of smaller group homes, camps, and treatment facilities;
- Maintaining safety through relationships and eyes on supervision rather than isolation and correctional hardware; and
- Providing intensive youth development offered by dedicated youth development specialists rather than correctional supervision by guards.³³

The outcomes for this model have been positive. According to the Missouri Department of Social Services FY 2015 Annual Report, after three years, **68.6%** of youth released from their facilities remained law abiding citizens, meaning they did not recidivate, they were not recommitted, or in prison.³⁴ In Virginia, only **26.6%** of youth released from the juvenile prisons had not been re-convicted of another offense and only **21%** had not been re-arrested within three-years.³⁵ In addition, while **11.1%**³⁶ of Missouri’s youth were re-incarcerated within three-years in FY 2015, Virginia’s three-year re-incarceration rate was **50.7%**.³⁷

Missouri’s model also helps youth progress in positive youth development measures, like obtaining their education. In Missouri, 74.7% of juveniles make a year of educational improvement for each year in custody, compared to 25% who show this progress nationally.³⁸ Youth in Virginia’s prisons do not have similar success. In 2015, only 28.2% of DJJ students passed the English Standards of Learning (SOL) and only 7.2% passed the mathematics SOL. Comparatively, statewide in Virginia, 79% of all students passed their English and Mathematics SOLs.

b. Virginia’s Current Model

Virginia currently has two juvenile prisons, Beaumont and Bon Air, both which have capacity to hold over 260 youth per facility. While the current administration of the Department of Juvenile Justice has proposed closing both Beaumont and Bon Air, their plan for replacing them is to construct two new juvenile prisons. One of the new prisons would be located in Chesapeake and would be combined with a local detention center to create a 112-bed

I made a mistake

but every body makes mistakes,

and im learning from it.



facility.³⁹ The other proposed replacement would be an 88-bed juvenile prison in Hanover County.⁴⁰ The combined cost for the two facilities is projected to be \$90.5 million.⁴¹ Nearly \$700,000 of the allotted budget would be spent on secure perimeter fencing alone.⁴²

The most obvious difference between the facilities in Missouri and Virginia's current and proposed juvenile prisons is size. According to the Casey Foundation report on the Missouri Model, "the largest of Missouri's 32 residential youth corrections programs has only 50 beds" and "each of the seven secure care facilities in Missouri serves 36 youth or fewer".⁴³ The average bed capacity is 20-30 beds., including those secure facilities for higher risk youth.⁴⁴ Missouri maintains small facilities even though it has a higher committed population than Virginia. During FY 2015, 384 youth were committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice in Virginia⁴⁵ compared to 713 in Missouri.⁴⁶

One reason rightsizing juvenile secure facilities is crucial is the individualized relationship between youth, the staff, and the facility superintendent. Paul DeMuro, a veteran juvenile justice consultant, suggests, "The most important thing in dealing with youthful offenders is the relationships, the one-on-one relationships formed between young people and staff. And not just the line staff. It's critical that the director of the facility know every kid by name."

Another significant difference between Missouri facilities and the proposed model for the new Chesapeake facility is that Missouri's facilities do not resemble prisons and are not run like prisons. Missouri's secure facilities are housed in former Catholic Schools and state parks and look and feel more like secure group homes. "Other than a metal detector at the front door and a perimeter fence surrounding the property, there are few locked doors and little security hardware of any type at Riverbend [Treatment Center (a secure care facility)]: just video cameras linked to monitors in the central office."⁴⁷ Young people are allowed to wear street clothes and retain mementos from home.⁴⁸ In addition, "Missouri has not found it necessary or useful to employ armed guards, cells, pepper spray, prolonged isolation, or any of the other harsh trappings of conventional correctional confinement."⁴⁹

c. Implementing a Missouri Model Across the Commonwealth

Beyond the new Chesapeake juvenile prison, the Task Force must also consider whether to build or renovate another facility to replace Bon Air. The Task Force should consider how to implement a Missouri model to replace Virginia's current model. Implementing the Missouri model would require a shift in how Virginia has traditionally run its secure youth facilities. For example, running multiple small facilities based on Virginia's existing juvenile prison staffing model—requiring large security teams, a multi-person maintenance department on site, etc.—would be very expensive. Missouri's success in running small secure facilities with a different staffing pattern, indicates it is possible to run small, secure facilities for high risk youth in an affordable manner.

Virginia's current juvenile prisons, Beaumont and Bon Air, cost \$408 and \$367 per youth per day respectively to operate. Thus, on average it costs over \$140,000 a year to incarcerate a young person in Virginia. The proposed juvenile prisons referenced above will not only cost \$90 million to build, but also cost over \$200,000 per youth per year to operate. In comparison, if operated in Virginia, Missouri's secure care facilities cost an estimated \$375 per youth per day to operate (around \$137,000 per youth per year). This number accounts for Virginia's higher salary scale, maintenance, and medical costs.

Based on comparable facilities in Virginia as well as facilities that were once run by the Department of Juvenile Justice, the cost of running a Missouri-like model here would be somewhere in the range of \$220 to \$500 per youth per day (\$80,300 to \$182,500 per youth per year). This wide range in estimated costs is due to differences in the cost of running a halfway house (\$80,300) versus an intensive treatment group home serving children with severe mental health needs (\$182,500)—it is likely that running a Missouri-style facility would cost somewhere between these two extremes at approximately, \$137,000 per youth.

Virginia can and should put in place more effective Missouri model facilities around the Commonwealth for less cost than DJJ's proposed plan. Not only would these kinds of facilities cost less in the short term, but they would also save the Commonwealth in costs related to recidivism in the long term.

Facilities	Capacity to Hold Youth	Operating Costs (Per Youth/Per Day)
Existing and proposed DJJ facilities		
Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center (including Oak Ridge housing)	282 youth ⁵⁰	\$408 per youth /per day (using FY2015 ADP and expenditures; would be \$314 at 100% capacity and FY2015 expenditures) ⁵¹
Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center	267 youth ⁵²	\$367 per youth /per day (using FY2015 ADP and expenditures; would be \$293 at 100% capacity and FY2015 expenditures)
The Governor's/ DJJ's Proposed New Facilities	152 (88 and 64) youth	\$568 per youth /per day (assuming 100% capacity is used) ⁵³
Models for estimating the cost for Virginia to operate Missouri-style facilities		
DJJ halfway homes (FY2014 budgeted costs)	20 (10 youth per halfway house)	\$219 per youth /per day ⁵⁴
Community Placement Program Beds in Juvenile Detention Centers	N/A (48 beds available for youth as of June 30, 2015)	\$240 per youth /per day ⁵⁵
Very intensive residential treatment for youth, including educational costs	15 youth	Approximately \$500 per youth /per day ⁵⁶
Missouri secure site per diem costs, adjusted for Virginia's higher salary costs, maintenance, and medical costs.	N/A	Estimate: \$375 per youth /per day ⁵⁷
Range of estimated cost for Virginia to operate Missouri-style facilities		
Missouri Model in VA	150 (30 bed for youth per facility x 5 facilities)	Estimate: between \$220 & \$500 per youth /per day ⁵⁸

What communities can do to RISE for Youth

1. Support and speak out in favor of evidence-informed programs and placements for youth in Virginia.

Every Virginian is impacted in one way or another by the transformation of the Commonwealth's juvenile justice system. Some Virginians are directly impacted, and have experienced or have had a loved one experience Virginia's traditional large juvenile prison model. Other Virginians pay taxes, and care about the safety of their families and how state money is or is not invested in their communities.

No matter the impact, every Virginian has a stake in the outcome of the Task Force and the transformation of the juvenile system. Community members should support and speak out in favor of evidence-informed programs and placements that work to rehabilitate youth in their communities.

- Community members should write and/or provide public comment to the Task Force on Juvenile Prisons in Virginia on the importance of using taxpayer money in the most effective way possible to rehabilitate youth.
- Community members should stay informed on juvenile justice reform. Members can join RISE for Youth and the Department of Juvenile Justice's list serve by visiting: www.riseforyouth.org and www.djj.virginia.gov, respectively.
- Community members should raise awareness of this issue by holding workshops, panels, and writing op-eds and letters to the editor.

2. Meet with local legislators and elected officials to encourage them to "RISE for Youth," and hold all elected officials accountable when their decisions result in more youth being incarcerated.

Local legislators and other elected officials need to hear from the community before making decisions that impact their constituents. Community members should write, email, or set up meetings with their representatives in the

General Assembly and their local elected officials (City Council members, Mayors, Board of Supervisors, Commonwealth's Attorneys, Sheriffs, etc.) and encourage them to support laws, policies, practices, and budget items that increase evidence-based programs and placements for youth as alternatives to youth incarceration. It is important that the community holds its elected officials accountable for using best practices, data, research, and feedback from individuals directly impacted by the juvenile justice system to guide their decision-making. Elections are one way to hold elected official accountable, but community members can also do so by giving public comment at public meetings, asking questions at town hall meetings, and scheduling one on one meetings.

3. Mentor, hire, and train youth who are at-risk or have been in contact with the juvenile justice system in order to reduce their likelihood of recidivism.

Youth who have positive adult figures (mentors) in their lives are less likely to exhibit behaviors (i.e. truancy, behavior that results in suspension, expulsion, and law enforcement referral, and dropping out of school) that result in their involvement in the juvenile justice system.⁵⁹ Community support is key for youth who are at-risk or have gone through the juvenile justice system. Mentoring, hiring, or providing apprenticeship training to youth who could end up incarcerated can change the trajectory of that youth's life and their impact on the broader community. Supporting these youth by mentoring them and helping them navigate critical services in the community can prevent negative outcomes. Research shows that family and community contact with individuals who are incarcerated can help to lower recidivism and reduce the rates of sibling involvement in the juvenile justice system.⁶⁰

Many localities have invested in youth employment programs, and there are also workforce development programs around the state. For more information, visit your locality's homepage or visit the Virginia Board of Workforce Development's page, Elevate Virginia at www.elevatevirginia.org/career-seekers/youth-programs/

Conclusion

Transforming Virginia’s juvenile justice system requires engagement from a broad range of stakeholders who want to “RISE for Youth.” From members of the Department of Juvenile Justice to members of impacted communities, without discussion, transparency, and collaboration, Virginia will inevitably recreate a broken system.

This report provides recommendations for how Virginians can work together to keep families united and increase public safety in our communities. We can put in place a new model for Virginia that replaces large outdated prisons with small, home-like, therapeutic settings that hold youth accountable while allowing them to mature in socially appropriate ways.

This is our call to action to develop a system that cultivates thoughtful, engaged, and law-abiding citizens out of all of our youth, including those who have made mistakes or bad choices. We must invest in them and in our communities; their success is the Commonwealth’s future.

Notes

- 1.] VA. DEP'T OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, DATA RESOURCE GUIDE FISCAL YEAR 2015, *DIRECT CARE*, 60, (2016) http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/DRG/Direct_Care.pdf
- 2.] VA. DEP'T OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING THE LENGTH OF STAY OF JUVENILES INDETERMINATELY COMMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, 7, (2015) <http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/residential/Guidelines-for-Length-of-Stay.pdf>
- 3.] VA. DEP'T OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, DATA RESOURCE GUIDE FISCAL YEAR 2015, *EXPENDITURES AND STAFFING*, 72, (2016) http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/DRG/Expenditures_and_Staffing.pdf
- 4.] http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/DRG/FY2015_DRG.pdf
- 5.] VA. DEP'T OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, DATA RESOURCE GUIDE FISCAL YEAR 2015, *DIRECT CARE*, 45, (2016) http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/DRG/Direct_Care.pdf
- 6.] VA. DEP'T OF EDUCATION, SCHOOL REPORT CARDS, http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_report_card/index.shtml
- 7.] GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE 2014-2016 BUDGET, <http://budget.lis.virginia.gov/sessionreport/2016/1/1719/>
- 8.] VA. DEP'T OF JUVENILE JUSTICE, TASK FORCE AUTHORITY, <http://www.djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/jcc-taskforce/Task%20Force%20Authority.pdf>
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