



April 2018

CDF Partners with Youth First to End Youth Incarceration in the U.S.

In 2016, youth justice leaders launched a national advocacy campaign, Youth First, to end youth incarceration by supporting state decarceration initiatives and the reinvestment of those funds into community-based alternatives. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is one of Youth First's national partners¹ as the initiative is in line with CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] campaign, which works to substitute the prison pipeline with a pipeline to success for every child. To that end, Youth First is focused on reducing youth incarceration by 50% in 15 states in five years.²

What Are the Main Goals of Youth First?³

1. Increasing the awareness of the ways incarceration negatively impacts youths.
2. Starting a national conversation about investing in community-based alternatives.
3. Creating a critical mass of support on the local and state level to spark change.

What Are the Characteristics of Youth Prisons?

Per recent 2016 data, nearly 46,000 youths were incarcerated in youth prisons in the United States (U.S.).⁴ These facilities are characterized by:

1. **Racial and Ethnic Disparities:** Per 2016 data, Black youth were 5 times more likely, Native-American youth were 3.2 times more likely, and Latino-American youth were 2 times more likely to be incarcerated compared to White youth.⁵
2. **Rigid Environments and Harsh Punishments:** In a survey of juvenile correctional facilities, forty-two percent (42%) of youth reported being afraid of abuse⁶ and nine-and-a-half percent (9.5%) of youth reported having been sexually assaulted.⁷
3. **Overall Costly and Ineffective Rehabilitation:** It costs a state \$100,000+ annually to incarcerate a young person. Incarceration also increases the chance that the youth will reoffend as an adult, highlighting the endless costs of incarcerating youth.⁸

What State Campaigns is Youth First Currently Working On?⁹

¹ Youth First Initiative. "Who We Are." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/who-we-are/>.

² Kelly, John. "Q&A: Liz Ryan, Founder, Youth First! Initiative." *The Chronicle of Social Change*. Fostering Media Connections, 10 Feb. 2015. Available at <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/news-2/liz-ryan-founder-youth-first-initiative/9404>.

³ See *supra* note 1.

⁴ Youth First Initiative. "#The50000." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/thefacts/>. Also, see <https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/corrections/qa08201.asp?qaDate=2016>.

⁵ See *id.* Also see <http://data.burnsinstitute.org/about>.

⁶ Mendel, Richard A. *Maltreatment of Youth in U.S. Juvenile Correctional Facilities*. Rep. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-maltreatmentyouthuscorrections-2015.pdf>.

⁷ See *supra* at n.3.

⁸ Youth First. "The Facts" Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/thefacts/>.

⁹ Youth First Initiative. "State Campaigns - Youth First." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/getinvolved/>.

- **Connecticut:** Connecticut became the first state to close all of its youth prisons when Governor Dannel Molloy announced that the state will close the Connecticut Juvenile Training School in July 2018. Now, the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance¹⁰ is focused on securing the reinvestment of those funds into community-based initiatives.
- **Kansas:** Kansans United for Youth Justice¹¹ helped pass Senate Bill 367 in April 2016, which establishes a Juvenile Justice Improvement Fund to ensure the reinvestment of state-funds to community-based services. It creates a Memorandum of Understanding for schools to use while working with law enforcement to improve school climate.¹²
- **New Jersey:** Youth Justice New Jersey¹³ successfully advocated for the closure of the largest youth prison for boys, the New Jersey Training School for Boys (“Jamesburg”) and the state’s girls’ youth prison, Female Secure Care and Intake Facility (“Hayes”). The campaign is now focused how these funds will be reallocated.
- **Virginia:** RISE for Youth¹⁴ celebrated the closure of the Beaumont youth prison in June 2017. However, state budget proposals include plans to build new youth prisons. In response, Rise for Youth is calling for the investment of funds into community-based alternatives to incarceration.
- **Wisconsin:** Youth Justice Milwaukee¹⁵ closed two youth prisons called Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake. Now, there are plans to convert these facilities into adult prisons and build one or two youth prisons for youth convicted of serious crimes. Youth Justice Milwaukee is fighting this plan and is committed to investing in community-based alternatives.

How Can You Get Involved?

1. **FOLLOW** Youth First on Twitter [@nokidsinprison](https://twitter.com/nokidsinprison) or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NoKidsInPrison/>.
2. **SIGN UP** from Youth First on their website at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/>.
3. **JOIN** the youth justice reform efforts in your state by starting or joining a statewide campaign.
4. **SHARE** your own experiences with the juvenile justice system at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/getinvolved/>.

Campaign Handles

Connecticut: @CTJJA
Kansas: @KSUnited4YJ
Virginia: @RISEforYouth

Children’s Defense Fund’s Focus

CDF-NY and CDF-CA are two state offices actively supporting juvenile justice reform initiatives.

One urgent issue is the Close to Home initiative, which permits young people in New York City entering the juvenile justice system to be placed in a residential program close to their families and communities. New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo re-authorized the Close to Home program for 5 years but did not include state funding from the program. CDF-NY is actively advocating for the authorization of funding for this program. For more information, see CDF-NY Juvenile Justice Spotlight: Close to Home.

¹⁰ Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. Available at: <https://ctjja.org/>.

¹¹ Kansans United for Youth Justice. Available at <http://www.kansansunitedforyouthjustice.org/>.

¹² Kansans United for Youth Justice. “Juvenile Justice Reform in Kansas: An Opportunity for School Leaders.” Available at <http://www.kansansunitedforyouthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/JuvenileJusticeReformHI.pdf>.

¹³ Youth Justice New Jersey. Available at <http://www.youthjusticenj.org/>.

¹⁴ RISE for Youth. Available at <https://www.riseforyouth.org/>.

¹⁵ Youth Justice Milwaukee. Available at <https://www.youthjusticemke.org/>.