

## The 4Rs: Reduce, Reform, Replace, Reinvest



### Will Connecticut Accept the Challenge?

#### Background

Nationally and globally, juvenile justice practitioners have come to a universal understanding: Prisons don't work well to change kids from law breaking to law abiding. No matter what they have been called--- training schools, reformatories, youth centers, the time for punitive congregate care facilities has passed. States are being challenged to redefine our response to juvenile crime and to create a future without juvenile prisons.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 2015, nationally 62% of youth incarcerated are for non-violent offenses. The inherent environment of youth prisons with locked doors, high fences and limited freedoms is considered by many to be counter-productive to the stability and effective delivery of services that kids need to have the greatest chance to not recidivate on release.

In addition, the cost of incarceration is a huge financial drain on state budgets. "Exhaustive research shows correctional confinement is an obsolete and financially wasteful mode for the care and treatment of delinquent youth".<sup>1</sup> In Connecticut, the cost of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) is \$33 million annually for what has amounted to an average monthly census of 45 juveniles.

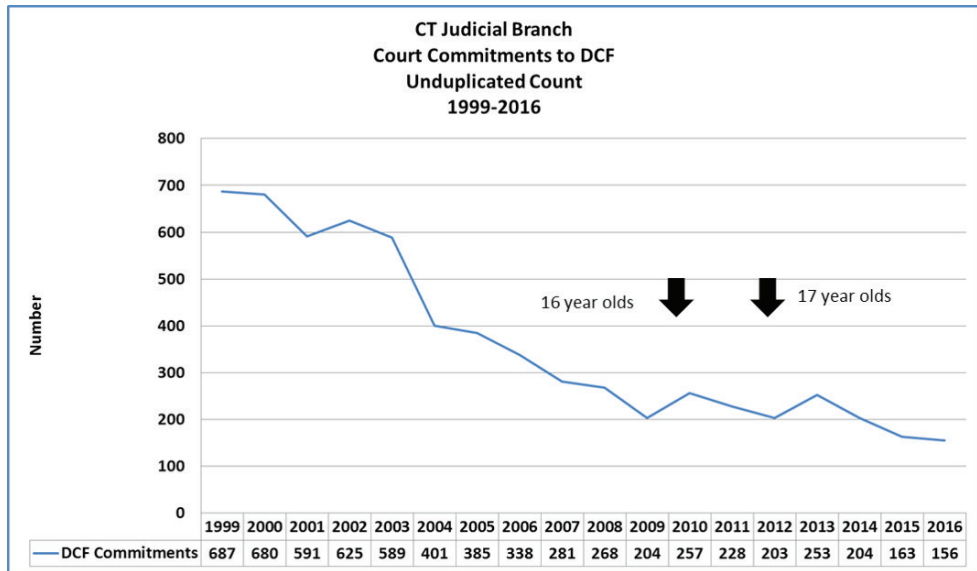
So, what does it take to effect significant reform in juvenile justice? What does it take to move a system to the point of closing juvenile correctional facilities for good? A report released last fall, from the Harvard Kennedy School and the United States National Institute of Justice titled "The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model" provides several answers.

They call it **The 4 R's: Reduce, Reform, Replace, Reinvest.**

#### Reduce

The meaning of reduce in this context is simple: If prisons don't work, then work needs to be done to reduce the incarcerated population until it can be eliminated. In Connecticut, our juvenile justice reforms have contributed to significant reductions in incarceration without compromising public safety. For example, juvenile crime rates have been dropping since 2007 even with the inclusion of 16 and 17 year old youth; juvenile recidivism rates have been dropping—down 15% since 2007 in probation; juvenile detention populations have been reduced, to the point where our two remaining detention centers which have 176 beds now hold about 35 daily; and commitments to Department of Children and Families for out of home placements has been significantly reduced---an amazing 77% since 1999, with fewer than 200 commitments in all of 2016 (See Chart on Back).

At CJTS, the population has dropped by more than 50% in the past 24 months alone. In fact, the Pew Center last year, determined that Connecticut had the largest reduction in juvenile incarceration in the country. Now, Connecticut is ready to take the next step. Under the leadership of Governor Dannel Malloy and with the support of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC), CJTS, Connecticut's only youth prison, will be closed by July 2018. Overall the population of kids coming into the system has been dramatically declining at all points in the juvenile justice system. This is a significant step in the right direction that puts Connecticut on the right path with the 4 R's.

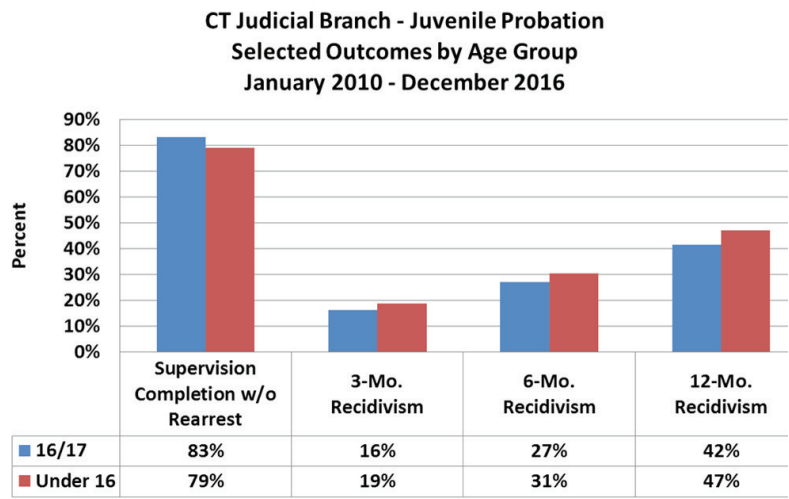


## Reform

Given the successful reduction in the pipeline to youth prisons, the alternate and more successful approach is to move toward a continuum of services that address the underlying causes behind a youth's involvement with the juvenile justice system. Connecticut has taken a lead in juvenile justice reform in the country through several strategies and changes in law that have resulted in the reductions noted in the previous section.

Some of the major reforms to date include:

- Removing status offenders such as truancy and defiance of school rules from placement in detention, and largely from the courts through the creation of community based alternative programs.
- Making Diversion a priority through the establishment of the Juvenile Review Boards throughout the state including the three largest cities; also new strategies to reduce school arrests.
- Moving 16 and 17 year olds into the Juvenile Justice system and getting even better outcomes than with the under 16 juveniles (See Chart).
- Reducing Incarceration through creation of community based evidence based programming and alternative residential options
- Reducing recidivism through the adoption of validated assessment tools, strength based treatment approaches and cognitive behavioral therapies.
- Adopting Results Based Accountability to maximize the opportunity for accomplishing intended outcomes.
- Establishing the JJPOC to provide overall leadership and direction and system wide goal setting.



## Replace

Connecticut has already begun addressing the replacement of juvenile correctional facilities. The New Haven Detention Center was closed in 2012 thanks to improved court screening and increased use of community alternatives. The two remaining detention centers in Hartford and Bridgeport remain open but are significantly below capacity. CJTS has been gradually but surely reducing its population and relying more on alternative residential programming and community based services through its parole division.

By July 2018 CJTS will be closed. What happens with the few youth who need secure facilities? Placing these youth in a treatment-intense program that focuses on turning their lives around has been proven most effective. These community-based, developmentally appropriate, secure programs are focused on close and respectful relationships with case managers, being geographically close to their home and natural ecology, and having continual access to rehabilitative services.

In January of this year, the JJPOC recommended that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) seek to replace CJTS with a network of community based treatment programs that would house between 8 and 12 juveniles. They asked DCF to issue a Request for Information (RFI) so that the private nonprofit sector can better understand the state's needs and indicate their ability to design and implement a program that will ensure public safety and the best outcomes for the juveniles. The RFI was issued on March 31, 2017. It is sincerely hoped that the private nonprofit sector will respond with ideas for this population by the response date of May 31, 2017.

## Reinvest

The concept of reinvestment is rooted in the Justice Reinvestment strategy—by reducing incarceration, states not only achieve better outcomes for the juveniles and increased public safety, but they should also experience significant cost savings. Prisons are very expensive to build and operate while community based programs are far more cost effective. Justice Reinvestment would strongly advocate that states take a portion of the savings from the closure of juvenile prisons and reinvest those dollars in programs and services that divert juveniles for the juvenile justice system and prevent them from returning.

A good example of how this reinvestment might work links the closing of CJTS to the implementation of one of the recommendations approved by JJPOC. The creation of the Statewide Community Diversion System Plan has cost implications. The Plan for this new system outlines community capacity needs as alternatives to state agency involvement and intervention. The Plan demonstrates how youth justice can be addressed within the context of their family, school, and community such that no child or youth is entered into the juvenile justice system without having exhausted appropriate community resources.

A coordinating hub that can weave together a system of supports and services including police, schools, families, court and child welfare systems, community organizations, faith based organizations, and neighborhood groups is a critical factor in its implementation. The Youth Service Bureaus (YSB) are an existing resource providing a comprehensive approach to services for children and youth ages 0 – 18. There are 101 YSBs across the state, covering 85% of the state's cities and towns, and while each may vary in their services, they are designed to meet the needs of their communities. However, as presently funded, they would be challenged to serve the continually expanding diverted population of juveniles.

For this reason, funding at \$3 million next fiscal year and an additional \$3 million in the following year will enable the YSBs to build the capacity to assess, case manage and serve the diverted population of kids. An investment in the front end of the juvenile justice system, however, can be the best hedge against spending on the deeper and more expensive end in the years ahead. That's why this is called "reinvest."

## Conclusion

The State of Connecticut is at a crossroads. So far we have been a leader in juvenile justice reform and we have closely followed the prescription of the 4 R's. We have reduced and reformed. We have made major strides at replacing and must continue until it is complete; and we must reinvest the savings from the deepest end of the system and open opportunities for those at the front of the system. Will Connecticut be among the first states to meet the challenge of the 4 Rs? That question should be answered in the next few months as policy makers continue to examine the best ways to improve our juvenile justice system.

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation No Place for Kids report, page 28

*The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy. Please visit our website at [newhaven.edu/tow](http://newhaven.edu/tow) and follow us on social media @towyouth.*



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