

Final Draft Diversion First Plan

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Reimagining Youth Diversion in Connecticut



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Purpose of This Report

In 2020, the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments (CSGs) presented to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC) of the Connecticut State Legislature (CSL) a set of recommendations for youth diversion reform. These diversion recommendations were required to align with the mandates of 1) directly addressing the areas where current system policy, practice, and resource allocations reflect what research shows to work; 2) using research to guide and outline best practices; 3) integrating the voices of constituent groups and stakeholders; and 4) aligning with implementation science strategies that promote the adaptation and dissemination across the social, political, and economic context of youth, their families, communities, and victims (Council of State Governments, 2020). These goals are important and critical to the success of Connecticut in supporting the healthy transition of all its youth into contributing, engaged, adult community members. Using fiscal year 2022 data, our task then is to ensure that we are supporting the healthy development of the 47,899 Black; 83,208 Latino/a/e; 95,120 combined Native American/Alaskan Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and 203,007 White youth currently residing in our state (2024, Connecticut State Office of Policy and Management).

In the report by the CSG, they documented a precipitous (26%) decline in delinquent referrals to the juvenile court. While the impacts associated with this decline were positive, one noted difference was the continued disproportionality observed. Youth of color were documented to receive more “formal” judicial system referrals than their white peers, even when they had no or few prior offences or

comparable felony offences. This disproportionality observed by the CSG persists to today. 2022 fiscal year data from Connecticut's State Office of Policy and Management shows that, on average, Black youth receive delinquent referrals at a rate of 43 youth out of 1,000, Latino/a/e youth receive delinquent referrals at a rate of 13 youth per 1,000, and White youth receive delinquent referrals at a rate of 10 youth per 1000 (2024, Connecticut State Office of Policy and Management). Being able to deliver equitable justice for juvenile offending must consider the ways that youth enter and navigate through the criminal justice system.

These observations also call for consideration for how across Connecticut we address the variation in the populations served in diversion programming; use of evidence-based screening tools and case management systems within these diversion services; the proposed diversion service delivery model; and funding to support diversion services within the existing Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs), mostly administered through the Youth Services Bureaus (YSBs). Because of this patchwork of supports for diversion, Connecticut was unsuccessful in appropriately diverting youth from entering and receiving supports that could direct them to health promoting behaviors and positive outcomes (Council of State Governments, 2020).

Since the delivery of this report by the CSGS, there have been two unsuccessful attempts at reworking and rewriting the diversion policy and practices as Connecticut strives to promote positive youth practices, restore harm caused by youth's misdemeanor offending, and set up a network of supports that are carefully constructed to meet the needs of **all** Connecticut youth, regardless of where they live. The alternative to arrest plans proposed and approved in 2022 and

2023 by the JJPOC, failed to receive approval by the Connecticut State General Assembly. The prearrest diversion plan concepts were sent back to the JJPOC for re-development. These failures signal that within the reform focus of diversion there needs to be careful consideration of the approach being proposed, the impacts across community and personal contexts, the importance of accountability within any proposed reform, the alignment of any strategy with the needs of key constituent groups (i.e., youth, their families, police), and careful attention to the fiscal and administrative burdens of said approach.

Recognizing that the reform mandate asserted in the CSG's presentation to the JJPOC of the Connecticut State Legislature remains unmet, a plan was commissioned by [Public Act 23-188, Section 1](#). This plan required that an implementation team develop a diversion plan for low-risk youth. Public Act 23-188 required the chairperson(s) of the JJPOC to identify representatives from the implementation team, whose task it would be to develop and submit a plan to divert low risk youth aged 10-17 from arrest.

The Diversion Workgroup of the JJPOC in collaboration with the Tow Youth Justice Institute and the Consultation Center at Yale University School of Medicine were commissioned to develop a plan for diversion. These efforts were completed in collaboration with representatives from Connecticut's Department of Children and families, State Department of Education, Department of Corrections, Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division, Youth Services Bureaus, Juvenile Review Boards, regional boards of education, police, and police-serving organizations. Within this collaboration a set of four broad recommendations were proposed to support Connecticut's diversion efforts.

These efforts were to 1) develop an implementation proposal for the standardization of all juvenile Review Boards; 2) partner with the State of Connecticut’s Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), Community Expertise Workgroup (CEW), and the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC), to develop a “Statewide Pre-Arrest Diversion Policy” for local law enforcement; 3) partner with DESPP, POSTC, and CEW to develop Youth Diversion Training Curriculum that police departments across the state would agree to complete every three years as part of the law enforcement accreditation process; and 4) partner with members of the CEW to identify youth and police to develop a program that aims to educate youth on sage and effective interactions with law enforcement. In the plan outlined below, we present the **first** of the four recommendations: ***A Standardized and Mandated Proposal for all Juvenile Review Boards to Deliver Diversion Supports.*** This proposed model does ***not supplant, but is meant to supplement, the diversion services*** currently being offered across the state of Connecticut to ensure that all its youth have access to equitable diversion services and resources by leveraging the supports available through Connecticut’s Department of Children and Families.

This plan is a reimagined model for youth diversion programs in Connecticut, focusing on first- and second-time offenders aged 10-17 who have committed low-level, misdemeanors, violations, or infractions. Our work represents a thorough investigation of current and historical diversionary practices, including the Juvenile Review Board’s Youth Diversion Pilot Program, in Connecticut and nationwide, with a focus on strategies to holistically address youth, their family, victim, and community needs, with accountability as a central tenant. This plan also centers the

practice of equity to ensure that all youth who live in Connecticut have access to braded supports that consider their needs. Following extensive research to identify existing gaps in youth diversion programming and accessibility throughout the state, we developed this comprehensive plan. This work represents a culmination of collaborative efforts by the JJPOC's Diversion Workgroup, its co-chairs, Tow Youth Justice Institute, and the Consultation Center, Yale University School of Medicine.

Our Diversion Plan offers a valuable opportunity to: (a) establish a foundation for a standardized and mandated statewide approach to youth diversion; (b) tailor programs to meet the distinct needs of local communities, their youth, victims, and families; (c) integrate restorative practices that have accountability as central to its efforts; (d) address and reduce racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system statewide; and (e) leverage existing DCF supports and infrastructures to back the consistent delivery of diversion services across Connecticut.

Introduction

Definition of Diversion Planning

Youth diversion redirects youth away from formal judicial proceedings and towards support services that address the specific needs, while holding them accountable. Diversion programs can offer developmentally appropriate practices to aid youth in decision-making and pro-social behavioral supports. Rather than exposing youth to the potentially harmful effects of the traditional justice system, diversion programs model for the youth how community accountability, as a central tenant of restorative justice practice, is leveraged, and with indicated supports, address the underlying causes of youth offending behaviors, such as family distress, mental

illness and substance use, school-related issues, and other factors. Diversion programs also model for the youth how community accountability can promote their development and growth through engagement in activities, acknowledging the harm caused, and providing alternatives to addressing that harm.

The critical element of youth diversion lies in its ability to address the individual-specific **needs** of youth to reduce recidivism and promote positive behavioral changes. By intervening early and providing appropriate resources, diversion programs can improve mental and behavioral health outcomes, reduce recidivism and criminal behavior, and contribute to safer communities. Furthermore, these programs are often more cost-effective than traditional punitive measures, offering a proactive solution that benefits both the individual and society¹.

The History of Youth Diversion

In the mid-20th century, there was a growing awareness of the negative impacts of formal judicial processing on youth, such as stigmatization, the potential for increased recidivism, and racial and socioeconomic bias. This led to the development of alternative approaches for addressing youth offending behavior, including probation and community-based interventions. These programs were

¹ *Office of Juvenile Justice and delinquency prevention (OJJDP)*. Archived | Diversion Programs I-Guide. (n.d.). <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/mpg-iguide/topics/diversion-programs/index.html#:~:text=Diversion%20is%20a%20term%20used,them%20accountable%20for%20their%20actions>

primarily aimed at addressing the underlying causes of delinquent behavior (Center for Juvenile & Criminal Behavior).

By the late 20th century, diversion programs became more structured and widespread, focusing on providing targeted services such as counseling, education, and family support. These programs sought to prevent the escalation of criminal behavior by focusing on early intervention and providing youth with a “second chance” through a signed agreement to adhere to the services offered².

Restorative justice, an approach to criminal rehabilitation, emphasizing repair and restoration rather than punishment, was popularized in the 1970s. It focuses on mending and building relationships between youth who have offended, victims, and the broader community (Armour, 2012). Restorative justice ultimately works by increasing the level of personal, social, and community accountability within juvenile justice. Youth can learn accountability for their actions due to their community’s taking accountability for systemic barriers that may be the root cause of delinquent behavior.

The evolution of diversion planning reflects a broader shift towards treating youth who have been arrested with an accountability-based, rather than punitive, approach, recognizing that most youth have the capacity for positive change when given the proper support (Armour, 2012; Menkel-Meadow, 2007).

² Gill, C. E. (2010, October 26). “second chances” and the discretion to divert: Differing Pathways through the Juvenile Justice System. <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Gill.pdf>

Community-Based Accountability: Restorative Justice - Does it Work?

Research has shown that restorative approaches to youth justice are effective. When implemented correctly, restorative practices can reduce recidivism (Sherman et al., 2015) and increase accountability in youth who have committed crimes (Choi et al., 2011). Restorative justice practices are often rooted in community-based accountability models (Dzur & Olson, 2004). These models center community (broadly defined and include victims) as key elements in the supports offered and in promoting the behavior change desired (Choi et al., 2012). Research suggests that restorative justice is developmentally appropriate for healthy adolescent psychological and emotional growth. Restorative justice, when paired with behavioral health and community-based services, has been shown to be especially effective for youth (Bright et al., 2023).

In recent years, several states have implemented restorative justice approaches to youth diversion programs at the state level. These state policies include Minnesota's 2023 law mandating the implementation of the Office of Juvenile Restorative Justice (State of Minnesota Bill S2909-4, § 19.1-19.3, 2023), and *Restorative Justice Colorado*, Colorado's state-led juvenile diversion initiative (Sawyer & Serres, 2022).

Importantly, restorative justice continues to be touted as a model for supporting minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, as well as youth residing in

rural areas³. Given the disproportionate representation of Black and Latino youth in the justice system, restorative justice’s holistic and nurturing approach helps address underlying needs to support positive youth development. By implementing these approaches at the state level, systems can identify and remedy structural inequities in the youth justice system.

Connecticut’s Diversion: A Snapshot

Diversion Process

It is imperative that we understand the current diversion practices in Connecticut before introducing our innovative approach. As of now, youth may be diverted at numerous points in their interaction with the juvenile justice system. For example, one way youth may be diverted from court proceedings is pre-arrest. In this instance, law enforcement may choose to refer the youth to a formal diversion program such as a Juvenile Review Board (JRB) (described below).

Another point of referral for youth diversion could be post-arrest. In these cases, youth are referred to diversion programs by law enforcement after their arrest. Successful completion of the diversion program, under some formal supervision system, usually results in dismissed charges. In some cases, the charges that resulted in the youth being supervised by the courts are greater than the misdemeanor charges that will be the focus of this diversion strategy. The Juvenile Court may also serve as a referral source. Parents, schools, community-based

³ Mendel, R. (2022, August 30). *Diversion: A hidden key to combating racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/diversion-a-hidden-key-to-combating-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-juvenile-justice/>

organizations, and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) are not appropriate for this Juvenile Review Board diversion process and may seek support through a Youth Service Bureau where appropriate.

Youth Service Bureaus and Juvenile Review Boards

Connecticut's **Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs)** are a key part of the diversion system. These bureaus offer a range of services to youth, such as crisis intervention, case management, and family counseling. Youth referred by police or schools can receive YSB services instead of entering the judicial system. Implementation of YSBs began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Public Act No. 75-487, An Act Concerning the Establishment and Operation of Youth Services Systems within the State, was passed in 1975. The current YSB statutes reside under Connecticut General Statutes §10-19M- §10-19R-. Currently, there are 102 YSBs serving 137 Connecticut towns and cities. As of 2024, state funding can be as low as 2% and as high as 50% of a YSB's total budget. Grants and local municipal funding may constitute the other funding support for YSBs (CYSA, 2024).

Several YSBs administer JRBs who review cases involving youth who have offended. These boards are made up of community members, law enforcement, and school officials. They recommend diversion options based on a youth's needs. Most JRBs function out of Youth Service Bureaus. However, no specific legislative mandate or statute designates the standardized and mandated development, role, or function of JRBs⁴. Funding for JRBs, like YSBs, also varies widely. For the 2024 fiscal year,

⁴ Connecticut Youth Services Association. (2016). (rep.). *JUVENILE REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES*.

about half of all JRBs received funding through the DCF Support and Enhancement Grant. Out of the 169 towns in Connecticut, roughly 135 of them have access to juvenile review boards. Without mandated standardization, JRBs function/operate differently, depending on the region and vary in their resources, services offered, and utilization by local police departments and other referral sources.

Between 2019 and 2023, there were 26,722 delinquent referrals⁵ in Connecticut, with the majority (10,371) being Black youth. This represents 6.23% of all youth and 21.7% of Black youth in the state of Connecticut during this time period⁶. These racial and ethnic disparities in delinquent referrals mimic the overrepresentation of Black and Latino youth in the juvenile justice system, nationally, further making the case for a standardized and mandated diversion process that would address these disparities and gaps in justice (JJPOC, 2023; Rovner, 2021).

Our Model of Diversion for Connecticut's 169 Towns

Reframing the R-N-R Model

It is important to note that the proposed diversion model draws from the existing Youth Services Bureau's (YSB's), Juvenile Review Board's (JRB) reimagined Diversion Procedures and Protocols, Connecticut's DCF Diversion First Plan, national reports, white and gray papers on diversion best practices recommendations (e.g., Best Practices in Youth Diversion, Advancing Racial Equity in Youth Diversion, Reforming

⁵ Delinquent Referrals include summons and arrest reports created for youth under age 18

⁶ *Juvenile justice policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC) equity dashboard*. CT Open Data Portal. (n.d.). <https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/Juvenile-Justice-Policy-and-Oversight-Committee-JJ/efuz-5jhe/>

Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach) and a review of academic papers with recommendation on evidence. Moving forward with recommendations from the Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA), the term “*Youth Diversion Team*” will be used instead of Juvenile Review Boards to better underscore the restorative approach of this diversion plan. This name change comes directly from the CYSA Youth Diversion Teams Protocols and Procedures.

Connecticut is unique in its presentation. With a population of 3.626 million people across 169 towns that operate independently, diversion needs to consider the autonomy of these towns, and the resources needed to meet programming requirements in a diversion infrastructure. Understanding this challenge, the diversion workgroup proposes a *Restorative-Needs-Responsivity* (R-N-R) system to



serve Connecticut’s youth as we work to divert low-level youth who have offended from formally entering the juvenile justice system. The R-N-R model proposed is a reimagining of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model often used in youth justice matters across the United States

(OJJDP, 2015). Recognizing that our goal is to divert youth from formally entering the juvenile justice system, we reconstructed the model to wrap itself around the youth and support their desisting from criminal behaviors. The R-N-R model is expected to be consistently delivered across all established diversion institutions, regardless of structure. The information provided below gives a conceptual framework for the work and lays the foundation for what the operational practices must include.

Within this framework, we propose an accountability expectation for Connecticut youth, who committed delinquent acts, that is integrated and central to its **restorative** practices. The restorative approach should equip involved Connecticut youth with the tools and skills to



repair the harm caused and simultaneously, the skills that reduce their likelihood of continuing these negative behaviors long term. To successfully achieve these outcomes, consideration must be made across their community, the “victim,” their family, and the youth. At each touchpoint (i.e., community, victim, family, individual), a key outcome of focus will be efforts to repair the harm caused by the criminal offense.

We also recognize that youth’s delinquent offenses do not occur in a vacuum. This knowledge predicates that careful consideration must be made of the **needs** of the involved youth that may be related to their delinquent behavior involvement. These needs need to be broad and comprehensive. In that formulation, areas for consideration may include, but are not limited to, behavioral health, substance use, physical health, positive youth activities, academic support, employment/financial, housing, positive relationships (i.e., mentoring), and reparations. It is essential to understand and acknowledge that youth who have committed low-level offenses may have needs that either impacted or precipitated their delinquent choices.

Thus, any diversion response system needs to be **responsive** to these needs by providing a menu of resources that are individually tailored to meet their needs. Within this consideration, again the diversion approach calls on the “community”

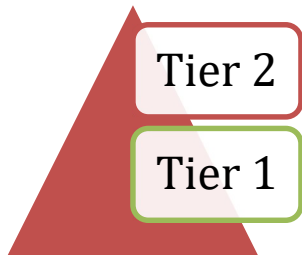
from which the youth come to lend aid in meeting these needs and mitigating future risk for offending. In this responsive approach, the diversion authority must have a roster of community providers across basic, emotional/behavioral health, physical health, social service, and enrichment supports that are positioned to meet whatever needs are identified.

Critical to this consideration is the interplay between how these supports are delivered, the cultural contexts associated, the understanding that no singular entity must meet all needs, and the value of cross-collaboration in facilitating an integrated approach to addressing the youth's needs. Broadly speaking, this approach acknowledges that by bringing community into the conversation as a partner and as a part of the solution, we may increase the connection of the youth to that community and reciprocally reduce their willingness to betray the community and its values.

A Tiered System to Connecticut Youth Diversion

In Connecticut most services are offered across its 169 municipalities that includes 19 cities, 149 towns, and one borough. While this system has its advantages, administering parallel support to youth, their families, the victim, and the community poses significant fiscal and logistical burdens. Understanding this challenge, we propose a ***two-tiered system*** based on the population density of the city/town/borough, the number of delinquent referrals observed, and the relative rates of delinquent referrals per 1,000 youth across the city/town/borough they come in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

With “equity” being a central tenet of this proposed approach, we also considered



mechanisms that support and facilitate this “new” diversion delivery model. In our tiered system, we envision uniform services offered in every Connecticut town but structured to accommodate the demands,

community make-up, and accountability expectations for youth who have offended.

Communities within the **Tier One** system have a population count of more than 40,000 residents (except for Manchester and Naugatuck), and or evidence the greatest number of delinquent referrals (i.e., >70), and or have the highest rates of delinquent referrals per 1,000 youth (i.e., >10 per 1,000) according to data from OPM’s 2022-23 fiscal year reports.

For demonstration purposes, an example tiered system is provided in the graphs below. There are 18 towns/cities included in this grouping. They include Bridgeport, Danbury, East Hartford, Hamden, Hartford, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Britian, New Haven, New London, Norwalk/*Darien**, Norwich, Stamford, *Greenwich**, Stratford, Waterbury, and West Haven.

	Town	Fiscal Year 2022 Delinquent Referrals
1	Bridgeport	277
2	Danbury	148
3	East Hartford	71
4	Hamden	140
5	Hartford	264
6	Manchester [†]	96
7	Meriden	168

8	Middletown	76
9	Naugatuck [†]	75
10	New Britain	316
11	New Haven	505
12	New London	113
13	Norwalk	101
14	Norwich	92
15	Stamford	200
16	Stratford	102
17	Waterbury	575
18	West Haven	123

† Town with fewer than 40,000 residents

In **Tier Two**, towns/cities with fewer than 40,000 residents and or less than 70 delinquent referrals in fiscal year 2022-23, and or delinquent referral rate of < 10 per 1000 youth were grouped together. This grouping sought to leverage DCF's resources to support the delivery of supports across a larger geographic area. While the geographic area is larger, the 2022-23 delinquent referrals observed in these town/cities are smaller in volume. By leveraging DCF's resources, we expect to offer comparable services to tier 1 within this geographic grouping. This includes ensuring that youth in Tier 2 municipalities have equitable access to diversion services, even if their population density or referral numbers are lower. For example, this may be achieved by leveraging technology (e.g., telehealth for counseling, virtual mentoring). Furthermore, we encourage smaller municipalities and Diversion Teams in Tier 2 to collaborate regionally in pooling resources and expertise to provide a wider array of services.

Towns/cities within a specific grouping are color coded for clarity. They include *Ashford, Brooklyn, Chaplin, Eastford, Hampton, Killingly, Pomfret, Putnam, Thompson, Woodstock, East Granby, East Winsor, Ellington, Enfield, Granby, Sommers, Stafford, Suffield, Union, Winsor Locks, East Lyme, Lyme, Montville, Old Lyme, Salem, Waterford, Chester, Clinton, Deep River, Essex, Killingsworth, Old Saybrook, Westbrook, Barkhamsted, Canaan, Colebrook, Cornwall, Goshen, Hartland, Norfolk, North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon, Winchester, Groton, Ledyard, North Stonington, Preston, Stonington, Canterbury, Griswold, Lisbon, Plainfield, Sprague, Sterling, Voluntown, Bozrah, Colchester, Franklin, Lebanon, Scotland, Windham, Branford, East Haven, Guilford, Madison, North Branford, North Haven, Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newton, Sherman, Harwinton, Litchfield, Morris, New Hartford, Torrington, Bethlehem, Kent, Plymouth, Roxbury, Thomaston, Warren, Washington, Watertown, Woodbury, Bristol, Burlington, Farmington, Plainville, Darien, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, New Canaan, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Westport, Wilton, Avon, Bloomfield, Canton, West Hartford, Winsor, Cromwell, Durham, East Hampton, Haddam, Middlefield, Portland, Milford, Monroe, Orange, Shelton, Trumbull, Bolton, Glastonbury, Hebron, Marlborough, Newington, Rocky Hill, Wethersfield, Berlin, Cheshire, Southington, Wallingford, Wolcott, Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethany, Derby, Middlebury, Oxford, Prospect, Seymour, Southbury, Woodbridge.*

	Town/City	Fiscal Year 2022-23 Delinquent Referrals		Town/City	Fiscal Year 2022-23 Delinquent Referrals
1	Ashford	< 6	11	Hartland	< 5
	Chaplin	U/C		Barkhamsted	< 5
	Hampton	< 5		Colebrook	< 5
	Brooklyn	17		Winchester	21
	Killingly	49		Norfolk	< 5

	Eastford	< 5		Goshen	U/C
	Pomfret	< 5		Cornwall	U/C
	Putnam	24		Canaan	10
	Woodstock	< 5		North Canaan	9
	Thompson	28		Salisbury	< 5
2	Stafford	12		Sharon	U/C
	Union	U/C	12	Groton	52
	Ellington	11		Ledyard	38
	Enfield	53		Stonington	30
	East Windsor	< 5		North Stonington	< 5
	Windsor Locks	14		Preston	< 5
	Suffield	6	13	Sprague	< 5
	East Granby	< 5		Lisbon	< 5
	Granby	9		Griswold	20
	Somers	6		Voluntown	< 5
3	Waterford	21		Canterbury	< 5
	Montville	31		Plainfield	34
	East Lyme	< 5		Sterling	< 5
	Lyme	U/C	14	Windham	62
	Old Lyme	< 5		Scotland	U/C
	Salem	< 5		Lebanon	6
4	Killingworth	< 5		Colchester	9
	Chester	< 5		Franklin	< 5
	Deep River	< 5		Bozrah	< 5
	Essex	< 5	15	East Haven	69
	Clinton	8		North Branford	13
	Westbrook	< 5		Branford	22
	Old Saybrook	< 5		Guilford	13
5	Kent	< 5		Madison	23
	Warren	< 5		North Haven	20
	Washington	< 5	16	Sherman	< 5
	Bethlehem	< 5		New Fairfield	< 5
	Watertown	30		Brookfield	< 5
	Roxbury	< 5		Bethel	18

	Woodbury	< 5		Newtown	20
	Thomaston	8		New Milford	22
	Plymouth	20		Bridgewater	U/C
6	Bristol	123	17	Torrington	63
	Burlington	9		New Hartford	< 5
	Plainville	21		Harwinton	16
	Farmington	19		Litchfield	6
7	Fairfield	61		Morris	< 5
	Easton	8	18	Orange	14
	Weston	< 5		Milford	62
	Westport	14		Trumbull	28
	Redding	< 5		Shelton	40
	Ridgefield	< 5		Monroe	24
	New Canaan	9	19	Glastonbury	19
	Wilton	9		Marlborough	< 5
8	Avon	12		Hebron	8
	Bloomfield	27		Bolton	< 5
	Canton	< 5		Wethersfield	13
	Simsbury	7		Newington	29
	Windsor	53		Rocky Hill	8
	West Hartford	111	20	Southington	27
9	East Haddam	< 5		Berlin	14
	Middlefield	< 5		Cheshire	25
	Cromwell	8		Wolcott	59
	Portland	9		Wallingford	56
	East Hampton	15	21	Oxford	15
	Haddam	< 5		Beacon Falls	< 5
	Durham	< 5		Bethany	< 5
1	Andover	6		Seymour	25
0	Columbia	< 5		Woodbridge	< 5
	Coventry	11		Ansonia	45
	Mansfield	8		Derby	33
	South Windsor	9		Southbury	10
	Vernon	53		Middlebury	< 5
	Tolland	7		Prospect	< 5
	Willington	< 5			

U/C = unable to confirm

In this configuration, aligned community resources help to meet the demands and extend the level of support possible because of the “combining” of resources. This approach lays the foundation for all of Connecticut’s youth referred for diversion services to access parallel supports that are consistent and align with the proposed approach.

Multicultural and Intersectional Approaches to Youth Care and Diversion

Given the focus of this diversionary plan, considerations must be made for developmental, gender /gender expression, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, ability, and cultural contexts that may impact how services are delivered and received.

Developmental considerations should address how age, cognitive, and other markers of development may impact how the model is delivered. Central to the developmental considerations are the key elements of the proposed approach and how the crucial ingredients to the diversion intervention are amended to facilitate their inclusion. Data shows that most of the delinquent referrals in Connecticut are for male youth. However, there have been increasingly more female youth being referred for services. Within this proposal, special considerations must be made for how gender and gender expression impact the delinquent acts the youth engaged, and the needs addressed as part of the diversion plan.

Relatedly, juvenile justice data consistently document that youth representing racial and ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in “formal” and more severe criminal justice services (i.e., incarcerated, probation, etc.). Reasons for these

differences have been varied but acknowledges that part of this overrepresentation is related to bias that often result in harsher penalties for these groups. As part of this diversionary proposal, programs will be asked to attend to the different outcomes related to the ethnic and racial makeup of the referents.

Sexual orientation has also been described as a unique identifier that can be negatively associated with poor outcomes in diversion programming. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that the sexual orientation of the referred youth is respected and appropriately considered/integrated into all diversionary decision-making.

Like sexual orientation, ability, be it physical, cognitive, and/or neurodiversity all play a critical role in a youth's ability to effectively harness the opportunity that a diversion program offers. This too must be considered as a diversion plan is developed and implemented in support of community, victim, family and individual healing. Individually, these markers of diversity have been shown to impact a youth's success when referred for diversion programming.

We ask that consideration be made for how social determinants of health, including identity, impact access and use of the proposed diversion intervention. We also underscore the intersectional ways that the presence of these determinants may configure to impact success when engaged with diversion programming. These factors also point to the cultural experiences of the youth referred for diversion services. Given the diversity of communities across Connecticut, special consideration must be made to respect the cultural context of youth, their families, and the community they live. It is important to note that integrating developmental, gender/gender expression, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, ability, and cultural

considerations should not be construed as license or justification for not managing and executing this plan. Rather, they should be used as adjunctive tools that enhance the basic expectations outlined.

Eligibility and Criteria for Diversion Services

The following represents suggested guidelines for youth diversion eligibility. This criteria has no bearing on how courts and their discretion in judicially handling risk-based processes for referrals. This plan highly emphasizes the importance of pre-arrest diversion.

Age

The legal age for arrest in Connecticut is 10. Thus, diversion services should be available to youth ages 10-17 in every town of Connecticut.

Offense

Eligibility for diversion programs should be standardized to serve youth who commit first- or second-time, misdemeanor, violation, or infraction offenses. Youth Diversion Team referrals are for “arrestable offenses” only pre or post arrest. For this reason, truancy and other non-delinquent behaviors are not appropriate for the Youth Diversion Team diversion process. Diversion programs are not designed for youth who repeatedly offended or those with severe delinquent offenses or felonies. Furthermore, the following criteria may serve as suggested immediate and discretionary disqualifiers for youth diversion services:

IMMEDIATE DISQUALIFIERS:

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- Felony offenses
 - Offenses involving serious physical injury
 - Offenses involving the use of, credible threatened use of, or credible implied use of a weapon of any kind towards another person
 - Sexual assault offenses.

DISCRETIONARY DISQUALIFIERS:

- More than 2 prior JRB referrals
- Offenses of a violent nature

Data keeping and referral records will allow the diversion program to confirm if the youth has received services in the past and if these services exceed the maximum number of referrals.

Location/Residence

The location of the offense and the residency of the youth who has offended should be considered when determining the diversion strategy for a youth. We recommend that the town of residence be used to determine where the youth will receive diversion services from a Youth Diversion Team.

Referral Source

The referral source for diversion services may impact how and where the diversion case is handled. Referral sources may include police and the Juvenile Court.

Needs

A youth's needs must be screened during the eligibility process to determine if and how the needs can be met through diversion. The needs of youth referred to diversion services should be assessed using a standardized, evidenced-based, holistic needs assessment battery. These tools should be sensitive to the ways that

development and factors that impact on development (i.e., cognitive, neurologic) may affect the final diversion plan.

Commitment

Youth and their families/caregivers should agree to complete all services deemed necessary for repair, restoration, and rehabilitation. This commitment will be assessed using consistent 30/60/90-day adherence follow-up and evaluation in addition to a case closing procedure (see Evaluation section).

Criteria of Services Offered through Youth Diversion Teams

What happens when a youth is referred to a Youth Diversion Team?

Rather than Juvenile Review Boards, youth diversion programs and protocols shall be handled through newly created Youth Diversion Teams. When a youth is referred to a diversion program, there are clear steps that should be taken that may help to facilitate their successful transition into and through the program as conducted by the Youth Diversion Team. Below is the staged model that clearly outlines who enters the program, what happens when one is referred, and how one navigates out of this system.

Step 1. Program Referral

Youth who meet the eligibility criteria outlined above need to have the referral agency complete and submit a one-page referral form. This one-page form provides the diversion program with basic information related to: the contact information of the referee, their family information, the nature of the charge(s), and the referent.

Step 2: Eligibility Screening

Upon receipt of the referral, the diversion program will review the information provided to ensure it aligns with the program criteria. Successful review and acceptance into the program will result in outreach to the youth and their family for an initial meeting.

Step 3: Meeting with the Intake Coordinator

The Intake Coordinator role shall be filled by someone with training and experience evaluating youth needs and providing access to appropriate support. Intake Coordinators should receive training in restorative justice applications. In this meeting, the expectations of the program will be outlined. In this meeting, the youth will be informed that:

1. The youth is expected to take responsibility for their actions.
2. Acceptance of responsibility will not be related to formally entering a guilty plea to the courts.

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3. The formal and informal assessments will then be completed. The youth will agree to complete a needs assessment to help in the creation of their diversion plan. Here it will be stressed that this diversion plan will be individually tailored.
 4. The length of time the youth will be involved in the program can range from three (3) months to twelve (12) months. Determination of the length of time involved in the diversion programming will be contingent upon the offense and the expectations across the systems involved. Length of time involved in diversion programming will be determined by the panel. From the time a case opens until the case closes, youth will receive case management services.
 5. The youth will be asked to agree to engaging in the process outlined. *If the youth signals an unwillingness, they will be referred back. The referral source will then take the step to evaluate the youth for the offense(s) that was/were the reason for the referral.*
 6. Appropriate releases will be completed to ensure open and supportive communication between impacted entities.
 7. The youth will be informed that, where appropriate, the victim involved in this case may be contacted and engaged as part of the diversion/restorative justice goals. There will also be efforts to integrate accountability measures that are community-based. These measures will be dependent on the offense committed.

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8. The youth will be informed that confidentiality is limited under this program. Safety is paramount to the program. The finalized diversion plan is expected to be agreed upon by the youth, their family, and, where appropriate, the victim. Any indicators that raise questions about safety will result in swift action.
 9. The needs assessment will be completed. The assessment tool is to be determined. However, this tool will be used to identify the strengths and needs of a youth across several domains including behavioral health, positive youth activities, academic support, financial/employment resources, social relationships, and substance use. These domains do not represent the exhaustive list of areas of focus. They do, however, represent the minimum areas expected to be a part of the diversion plan constructed.
 10. The youth will be informed that performance monitoring will be conducted as part of the diversion program accountability process to ensure that services and program offerings are being delivered. This will be related to helping the diversion program meet the reporting requirements for Connecticut State and the funders.
 11. Progress through the constructed diversion plan will be benchmarked with clear indicators that allow them and the program to know that they are successfully meeting the expectations laid out.

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12. On the construction of this plan, the youth and their family will review, amend, if needed, and sign the plan. This will constitute an agreement between them and the diversion program.
 13. The youth and their caregivers will be informed that this approach allows them to hold the program accountable for its responsible role in their lives and, conversely, for the diversion program to benchmark whether it is meeting the expectations of the plan constructed.
 14. It will be explained to the youth and their caregivers that unsuccessfully engage with program offerings will result in referral back to the referral source.

Step 4: Restorative Justice Panel Meeting with Youth Diversion Team

The Youth Diversion team will meet with staff, the youth, and their caregivers to determine an appropriate restorative justice plan which repairs the harm done and addresses the identified needs. Services for other identified needs, such as academic, behavioral, or health supports may be discussed at this step as well. This process will include identifying steps the youth can take to redress the harm they caused through their criminal offending. The panel meeting (circle) is meant to be a restorative format. First, the circle will ask the youth questions about their behaviors and their effect on the community at large. Next, the circle will collaborate with the youth, creating the agreement together and identifying steps to take to repair harm to the victim, family and community. Importantly, the youth will also be asked about what individual supports and needs they have.

Step 5: Completing the Agreed Upon Paperwork and Quality Assurance

The process will proceed once the youth, their family, and the diversion case manager agree. Present the Diversion Plan across the Community, Victim, Family, and Individual Domains: Present the diversion plan across the community, victim, family, and individual domains. Completion of this plan signals the formal beginning of the diversion intervention process. This plan will be signed by the youth, their family member, and the program. If appropriate, the victim will have the opportunity to review and agree to the plan developed.

1. Consent to the Diversion Plan: The youth and their family are expected to agree to the finalized diversion plan. Where appropriate, the victim will also agree to the diversion plan.
2. Delivery of the Expectations of the Diversion Plan: With the diversion plan developed, the program, the youth, and their caregiver will be expected to connect with the agreed upon community supports and program offerings outlined. The case manager will monitor connection to the recommended actions monthly. A checklist will be used to monitor access and matriculation in recommended services/actions. This checklist will parallel the diversion plan and be integrated into the youth's case file.
3. Optional Amendments to the Plan: As the case manager and other community professionals/providers work with the youth, new areas of intervention/needs/strengths may be identified. With all party agreement, the plan can be amended to accommodate and or integrate these new areas. All parties must agree to these changes.
4. Program Completion: Successful completion of the recommendations outlined in the diversion plan will constitute what is agreed upon. While

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- the diversion plan may be amended to accommodate new and developing challenges/experiences of the youth, in general it is expected that for successful completion to occur, the plan as outlined must be met.
5. Program Satisfaction and Review Documentation: Before the youth, their family and the victim (where appropriate) are discharged, they will be asked to complete a program satisfaction survey that will provide feedback and help to advance services for future clients.
 6. Sign off and Case Closing: A case closure meeting will occur before officially closing the diversion case. Discussion of any updates and any additional resources that would be helpful at that time. All parties associated with the diversion plan will sign off indicating that it was completed, and the youth has met the requirements as outlined. This signifies the official case closure.

Evaluation Criteria

Measuring the Effectiveness of this Approach

We developed a logic model to guide the implementation and evaluation of our diversion plan. This model ensures a clear and structured approach to improving access to and utilization of youth diversion programs across the state. This model outlines the critical components of our strategy, including inputs, activities, outputs, and desired outcomes. The logic model serves as a roadmap for assessing the plan's process and impact, helping us stay aligned with our objectives, and make data-driven adjustments as needed throughout implementation.



Reimagining Youth Diversion in Connecticut Logic Model

Problem

Research shows that youth with minor criminal infractions are at increased risk when exposed to the justice system. Connecticut has no and needs a uniform approach to diverting youth who have committed minor infractions.

Objective

Develop a state-level diversion policy to determine an equitable solution to youth justice. This policy plan may help reduce recidivism, result in a less-burdened criminal justice system, and create safer Connecticut communities.

Inputs/Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Connecticut Department of Children and Families Services (DCF) ● Connecticut Youth Services Association (CYSA) ● Police Departments ● Schools and School Systems ● JJPOC ● Youth Service Bureaus ● Juvenile Review Boards ● Youth and Families ● Community Partners ● Trained Staff 	<p>Referral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Refer 1st or 2nd time youth who have committed misdemeanor crimes, violations, or infractions to diversion services using a tiered diversion approach. ● Review and describe the diversion process to referred youth, their families, and the victim of their crime (where appropriate). <p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluate use using a multiculturally informed interview in conjunction with a needs assessment (to be determined). <p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop a Diversion Plan that is restorative in focus and based on Needs Assessment (May include mentoring services, behavioral health services, family counseling, employment services, school-based interventions, etc.) ● Obtain a signed agreement agreeing to the terms of the diversion plan by all parties involved (Youth, Caregiver, Case Worker, and Victim [if applicable]). <p>Evaluate</p> <p>Assess Youth’s Progress at the 30/60/90-day review mark by updating the diversion plan</p>	<p>Referral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # and % of Youth referred to diversion programs ● Referral sources for youth who present to the diversion program ● # and % of youth who refused the diversion referral ● # and % of youth and families who are described the expectations of the diversion process <p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # and % of completed Needs Assessments <p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # and % of Diversion Plans Developed ● # and % of Diversion plans signed ● # and % of diversion plans rejected by youth, families, and victims ● # and % of community partners engaged <p>Evaluate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # and % of youth who completed satisfaction surveys ● # and % of family members who completed satisfaction surveys ● # and % of victims who completed satisfaction surveys ● # and % of follow-up assessments completed by youth who consented to services ● # and % of youth and families who present to community resources recommended in their diversion plan 	<p>Referral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the referral source’s use of the diversion services. <p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the number of youth reporting that their needs were heard and addressed in the diversion programming <p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in program satisfaction by youth, their families, and victims (Assessed at each evaluation point_ ● Increase in the skills reported by the youth ● Increase the level of support the youth and their families report feeling from their community (Assessed at each evaluation point) ● Increase the youth and their family's utilization of services in the community. ● Reduction in number of annual referrals to juvenile courts from baseline (Measured using historical and current data from the CT Juvenile Justice Equity Dashboard)

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