Financing Youth Justice in the COVID-19 Era

Most juvenile justice funding is state and local.

- Between fiscal years 2002 and 2020, federal investment in juvenile justice declined 41.5 percent.
- Federal spending on juvenile justice services nationwide in FY 2020 was $320 million, roughly the same amount the state of California spent in the same year ($290 million).

Youth incarceration is expensive and ineffective.

- The average state cost of youth incarceration is $588 per day or $214,620 per year per youth and is actually even higher in some states.
- Incarceration disconnects youth from family and social supports, interferes with prosocial development, and does a poor job of preventing reoffending.

There is a critical need to invest in a continuum of care and opportunity for kids.

- Resourcing a continuum of care and opportunity in communities that experience concentrated disadvantage is the next frontier of juvenile justice reform.
- Community-based interventions are typically more effective and cost efficient than incarceration.

Funding for community-based services is at risk in the COVID-19 state budget crisis.

- States view incarceration as a must but often see community programs as a bonus.
- We are already seeing evidence of state cuts (see, e.g., stories in Florida, New Jersey, and Wyoming).

States and localities are finding creative ways to invest in critical youth services.

- Governor Jerry Brown allocated $37.5 million of the FY 2018 budget in California to create the Youth Reinvestment Fund, which supports local diversion programming in underserved communities with high rates of juvenile arrests.
- Lena Pope, a nonprofit in Fort Worth, Texas, leased land to a commercial developer and collects roughly $1 million annually from the shopping center, using that money to support comprehensive counseling and education for youth in the community.
- In 2004 and 2014, voters in Oakland, California, approved Measures Y and Z, ballot initiatives that created and renewed a 10-year source of funding to support police and fire services and violence prevention and intervention. In FY 2018, the tax generated $8 million that supported 26 community-based organizations working to curb violence in the city.
- For more information, see the Urban Institute’s 2019 report, Promoting a New Direction for Youth Justice: Strategies to Fund a Community-Based Continuum of Care and Opportunity.

Contact: Samantha Harvell; sharvell@urban.org; 202.641.7635
What Is a Continuum of Care and Opportunity?

**Prevention**
Early Care and Education, School-Based Programs, Parenting Programs

**Treatment**
Substance Use, Mental Health, Family Therapy

**Intervention**
Mobile Crisis, Victim Services, Restorative Justice

**Supports**
Mentoring, Family Respite/Support, Healing & Recovery

**Opportunities**
Prosocial Enrichment, Recreation, Civic Engagement & Service Learning

**Community Development**
Affordable Housing, Jobs & Economic Development, Infrastructure