

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?

