Youth incarceration in Connecticut has changed significantly in the past several years. In 2018, the then governor Dannel Malloy closed the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS), the state’s only remaining youth prison. Since the closure, boys committed to state facilities have been placed in special postconviction units in one of Connecticut’s two juvenile detention centers, whereas girls have been placed in a contracted facility operated by a private nonprofit organization (Tow 2019b). As of May 2020, no publicly available data existed on youth incarcerated postadjudication—that is, youth who would previously have been incarcerated at CJTS. This snapshot summarizes trends in two related populations: youth held in juvenile detention centers predjudication and youth transferred to adult court and supervised by the Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC).

As in most other states, youth detention rates have declined significantly in Connecticut in the past decade. However, Connecticut incarcerates an increasing proportion and disproportionate number of youth of color. From 2015 to 2019, the share of youth of color admitted to juvenile detention increased from 79 to 84 percent (Tow 2019c). Moreover, despite the decline in youth detention, Connecticut has not invested in a continuum of community-based alternatives to incarceration to provide intensive, individualized services to youth in the state.
Admissions to Juvenile Detention Fell 63 Percent since 2006

Between 2006 and 2019, preadjudication admissions to Connecticut’s two juvenile detention centers (the Bridgeport and Hartford Juvenile Detention Centers) declined nearly two-thirds (63 percent) (Tow 2019a).²

FIGURE 1
Preadjudication Admissions to Juvenile Detention, FY 2006–19

Although Youth Admissions Have Declined, Racial and Ethnic Disparities Have Worsened

Preadjudication Admissions Have Declined Less for Youth of Color

Although preadjudication admissions declined overall and declined for white, Black, and Hispanic youth between 2015 and 2019, admissions declined less for youth of color. During this period, preadjudication admissions fell 56 percent (from 403 to 177) for white youth. However, admissions only fell 49 percent (from 908 to 465) for Black youth, and only 28 percent (from 598 to 432) for Hispanic youth.³ In other words, the steep overall decline in youth detention has benefited youth of color less than white youth.
FIGURE 2
Preadjudication Admissions to Juvenile Detention by Race/Ethnicity, FY 2015–19

Number of admitted youth

Source: Tow (2019c).
Note: FY = fiscal year.

Share of Youth of Color Admitted to Juvenile Detention Increased

Although preadjudication admissions of youth of color to juvenile detention declined, the proportion of youth admitted who were youth of color increased between 2015 and 2019. In 2015, 79 percent of youth admitted to juvenile detention were youth of color; in 2019, despite successful state efforts to reduce youth incarceration overall, 84 percent of youth admitted to juvenile detention were youth of color (Tow 2019c).
Connecticut Disproportionately Detains Black and Hispanic Youth

In 2019, 43 percent of youth admitted to juvenile detention in Connecticut were Black, even though only 12 percent of its youth population (people ages 12 to 20) as of 2018 were Black. Similarly, 40 percent of youth admitted to juvenile detention in 2019 were Hispanic, even though only 21 percent of the state’s youth as of 2018 were Hispanic. By contrast, 16 percent of youth admitted to juvenile detention in 2019 were white, whereas 61 percent of the state’s youth as of 2018 were white (Tow 2019c).
Youth Admissions to Adult Prisons Fell 94 Percent since 2006

In addition to the increasing racial disparities in Connecticut’s juvenile justice system, problems persist regarding the declining (though still significant) number of youth transferred to the state’s adult correctional system. Boys transferred to the adult system are incarcerated in the Manson Youth Institution (Manson), and girls are incarcerated in the York Correctional Institution (York), both of which are DOC prisons that house minors.⁵ Between 2006 and 2019, admissions to Manson and York fell 94 percent (Tow 2019a).
Although youth admissions to Manson and York are declining, most youth admitted to and incarcerated at Manson are unsentenced. Of the youth in custody at Manson as of September 2019, nearly 70 percent were unsentenced (Tow 2019b).

Note: FY = fiscal year.
Average Daily Population of Youth in DOC Custody Fell 28 Percent since 2014

Between 2014 and 2018, the average daily population of youth in DOC custody fell 28 percent (Tow 2019a).
Reform Efforts and Persistent Issues in Connecticut

Since CJTS closed, Connecticut stakeholders have focused on how best to supervise youth at the state level. For example, the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, a legislatively mandated group with 40 cross-system members (including child and parent advocates), completed an 18-month strategic planning process in December 2018. Its plan identified four goals for 2019 through 2021: (1) limit youth entry into the justice system by reserving the formal justice system for cases that cannot be diverted or appropriately served by alternatives; (2) reduce youth incarceration; (3) reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system; and (4) set appropriate lower and upper age limits for the juvenile justice system. Given the disproportionate incarceration of youth of color (particularly Black youth), reducing racial and ethnic disparities is critical to making Connecticut’s juvenile justice system more equitable and just.

Furthermore, Connecticut has not invested in a continuum of community-based alternatives to incarceration. The state traditionally housed youth in large, state-run facilities like CJTS rather than in small community-based treatment centers, and it has struggled to find community-based providers since CJTS closed. Funding is needed to provide intensive and individualized community wraparound services, including residential and nonresidential community-based programs. Although its past and
ongoing efforts to reduce youth incarceration are notable, Connecticut’s next challenge is to address the disproportionate incarceration of youth of color and invest in comprehensive, community-based alternatives to incarceration.

Notes


2 All data from Tow (2019b) refer to fiscal year.

3 All data from Tow (2019c) refer to fiscal year.


References


About the Authors

Colette Marcellin is a research assistant in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where she works on projects related to criminal and juvenile justice reform, behavioral health, and trauma-informed programs.

Samantha Harvell is a principal policy associate in the Justice Policy Center. Her work focuses on bridging research, policy, and practice in juvenile and criminal justice.

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