

# Transforming Closed Youth Prisons

## Repurposing Facilities to Meet Community Needs

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### YOUTH PRISON REPURPOSING EFFORTS

The Apache County Juvenile Detention Center (AZ) was converted into [the LOFT Teen Community Center](#).

The Fred C. Nelles School (CA) is becoming a [residential development project](#).

The Washtenaw County Juvenile Detention Center (MI) is being transformed into a [mixed-income, sustainable living community](#).

The Al Price Juvenile Correctional Facility (TX) is becoming a [hub for social services, housing, and recovery support](#).

The Tryon Juvenile Detention Center (NY) was repurposed into a [technology park](#).

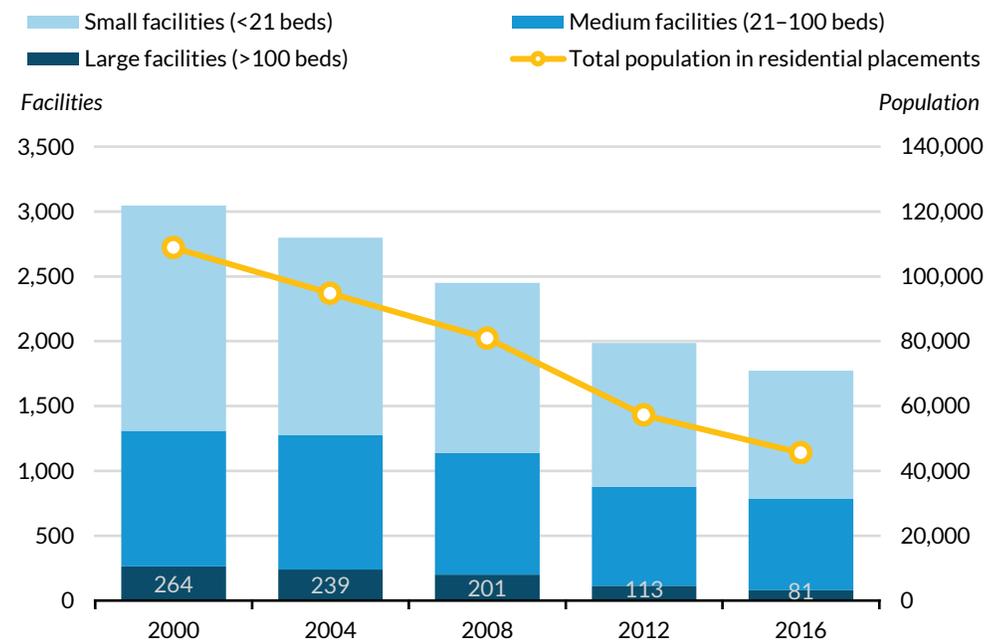
The Spofford Detention Center (NY) is being redeveloped as a [campus for affordable housing and commercial business development](#).

Between 1999 and 2015, the number of youth detained or placed out of home fell by more than half, leading to hundreds of youth prison closures. Over roughly the same period, the number of operational youth correctional facilities dropped 42 percent. Vacant facilities bring a range of fiscal, public health, and safety concerns to communities and act as physical reminders of the harmful impact of incarceration. Left vacant and unchanged, youth facilities could be reopened as prisons.

**Localities are identifying ways to repurpose youth prisons into assets for neighborhood revitalization, job creation, social services, and business growth.**

State and local decisionmakers have begun transitioning vacant land into lasting, sustainable projects that produce economic growth, fulfill a community need, and provide previously unmet services to residents. These projects include affordable housing units, community centers, and commercial business developments.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Trends in Youth Facilities and Residential Populations**



Source: *Juvenile Residential Facility Census Databook, 2000–2016*, National Center for Juvenile Justice.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS TO SUPPORT REPURPOSING EFFORTS

Our interviews with 41 stakeholders involved in repurposing efforts across the country revealed lessons learned and important considerations for improving the processes by which organizations can repurpose land. While some considerations vary across states, localities, and regions, these key recommendations are applicable across an array of jurisdictions:

- Consider the costs and missed opportunities of unused, vacant facility land, including costs to municipalities and the impact on local property values and crime rates.
- Be intentional about priorities for the property early on, and clearly articulate requirements for potential occupants.
- Consult with the community to identify local needs.
- Facilitate partnerships with key stakeholders early and often.
- Streamline the approval process for transferring land.
- Educate and partner with community members.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS INTERESTED IN REPURPOSING LAND

- Educate and partner with community members in your repurposing plan.
- Be realistic about timeline, resources, bureaucratic processes, and structural issues.
- Partner with formerly incarcerated stakeholders and be intentional about the impact the property has on community members.
- Collaborate with multiple stakeholders, agencies, and community organizations early and often.

## OUR METHODS

We collected information for our brief through (1) a document review of publicly available information, including annual reports, news sources, and materials related to land purchases and repurposing efforts; and (2) semistructured qualitative interviews with 41 stakeholders from repurposing efforts across 12 sites, including juvenile justice professionals, county and city officials, representatives from community organizations, business representatives, elected officials, state officials, and other relevant experts.

For more information on repurposing closed youth prisons, read the full brief at [urban.org/transformingyouthprisons](http://urban.org/transformingyouthprisons).

FIGURE 2

THE **\$1.2 MILLION** TEXAS SPENT ANNUALLY TO KEEP AN **EMPTY YOUTH PRISON OPEN** IS **EQUAL** TO THE FUNDING FOR A **FULL YEAR** OF

