



Youth Justice

Implement a third-party review of Tennessee's youth justice system to evaluate success, outcomes and safety.

WHY

The youth justice system is working to support youth with complex trauma. To be successful, the system relies on many different parties and service providers including the courts, schools, private providers, law enforcement, county detention centers, residential treatment facilities and the Department of Children's Services.

The work of our youth justice system is too broad, comprehensive and critical for one department to manage. An effective system requires a comprehensive state-wide plan to implement services before, during and after custody.

One of the greatest investments in our youth's future and community safety we can make is to ensure that when children are in custody, they are receiving intensive, wrap-around services no matter where they are placed.

Over 85 percent of the youth in Department of Children's Services Custody for delinquency have had prior contact with the Department on the dependent/neglect side.¹

In our survey of youth in detention centers, the average number of challenging life experiences prior to custody was 6.5, with the most common being difficulty in school or substance use. Nearly one in three had a parent leave, die or be incarcerated.²

Having an in-depth analysis of successes and outcomes from these facilities will better guide our future focus and investment.

Kentucky passed legislation this year which requires a third-party performance review of pre-adjudication facilities.³

Our children should return home from the justice system healthier, better educated, safer and more equipped to handle the future than when they entered.

In April 2021, of delinquent custodial youth:⁴

36 percent were in a JJ enhanced/Staff Secure Facility

31 percent were in community placement
20 percent were in a hardware secure facility; and

12 percent were in jail/detention.

More than half of youth surveyed in detention centers reported needing more help with school or getting their Hi-Set /GED.²

Quotes from youth in Tennessee detention centers in Spring of 2023.²

What would you change about school, court, detention, or probation to make it better or more helpful?

"To make detention better allow more contact with other detainees and instead of keeping us locked in a cell for 18 hours on a week day and 22 hours on weekends give us more rec time"

"Let them understand that detention doesn't help troubled kids, it makes them worse. Courts need better programs for serious trouble kids like me. We need more help than just being thrown in a cell."

"To have help understanding my math class"

"less holding time before treatment"

"More things to do while in detention. Give help for the one's that need."