

# Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Working for Youth Justice and Safety

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) was **established in 1974** to guide national efforts to prevent delinquency, strengthen the juvenile justice system, and protect children. The challenges facing youth have changed considerably in the intervening years, but OJJDP's support of **initiatives that improve outcomes** for *all* young people remains constant.

OJJDP is a component of the **Office of Justice Programs** within the U.S. Department of Justice. Liz Ryan serves as OJJDP Administrator.



## OJJDP Priorities

The priorities described in this paper reflect OJJDP's guiding philosophy: to enhance the welfare of America's youth and broaden their opportunities for a better future. To bring these goals to fruition, OJJDP leads efforts to transform the juvenile justice system into one that—

- Takes adolescent brain development research into account and **treats children as children**, *not* as adults.
- Recognizes that most **young people are better served in their own communities** and that outcomes are improved when families are involved in youth's treatment.
- **Opens up opportunities for system-involved youth** so they have the same opportunities as youth who have not had contact with the juvenile justice system.

## Vision

OJJDP envisions a nation where all children are free from crime and violence. Youth contact with the justice system should be rare, fair, and beneficial.

## Mission

OJJDP provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to youth delinquency and victimization. The Office helps states, localities, and Tribes develop effective and equitable juvenile justice systems that create safer communities and empower youth to lead productive lives.

## OJJDP at a Glance

OJJDP works with state, local, and Tribal communities to reform juvenile justice systems to better serve justice-involved youth and their families.

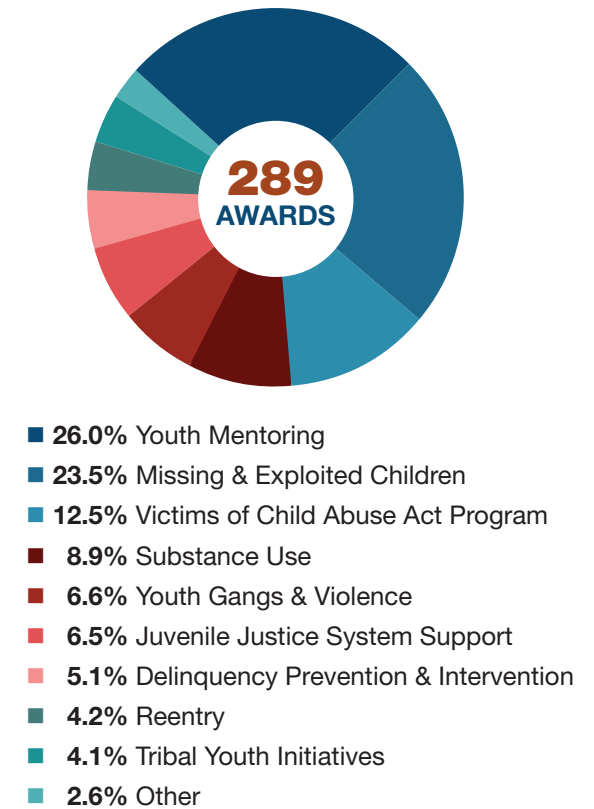
When we help young people find positive pathways to success, we simultaneously foster strong families and healthy communities. As part of these efforts, OJJDP—

- **Develops policy and guidance** for the effective implementation of juvenile justice systems nationwide.
- **Collaborates with federal, state, local, and Tribal partners**—through listening sessions, site visits, webinars, and training events—to advance improvements in juvenile justice and ensure the best outcomes for youth.
- **Monitors and aids state compliance** with the core protections of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.
- **Awards formula funding to states** to improve juvenile justice systems and address juvenile delinquency.

- **Awards discretionary funding** through a competitive process to support a continuum of services for youth at risk of delinquency and victimization.
- **Publishes and shares information** on youth justice and child protection topics with practitioners, policymakers, and the public.
- **Provides training and technical assistance** to address the needs of youth justice and child protection professionals and help them adhere to best practices in their work.
- **Sponsors research and data collection** to help the nation understand and effectively address youth justice and child protection issues.
- **Supports the activities of Federal Advisory Committees** to coordinate federal juvenile justice programs and make recommendations to the President, Congress, and the OJJDP Administrator.

### Fiscal Year 2021 Grant Awards

In **fiscal year 2021, OJJDP awarded nearly \$344 million in discretionary funding** for programs, training and technical assistance, research, and information dissemination activities in support of its mission.



# A Focus on Impacted Populations and on Racial Equity

OJJDP's priorities are enhanced by our unwavering commitment to—

- **Center Impacted Youth and Families:** **OJJDP listening sessions** with formerly incarcerated youth and their parents/guardians confirm persisting challenges with the juvenile justice system. Too often, families receive little to no information about the legal process, children are held in facilities located far away from their families, and mental health, education, and reentry services are lacking.

Centering impacted youth and families—by engaging them as partners in the work and empowering them to share their valuable insights—is crucial to bringing about a reformed juvenile justice system. The field must be open to hearing about and acting upon what *doesn't* work as well as what does.

- **Improve Racial Equity and Fairness in Juvenile Justice:** The **research** is irrefutable—youth of color are treated more harshly than white youth by the juvenile justice system, even when charged with similar offenses, and are more likely to be prosecuted in adult criminal court and placed in adult jails and prisons.

The field must renew its commitment to reducing racial inequity and end the disparate treatment and impact that youth of color who come into contact with the juvenile justice system experience.

## We Would Like To Hear From You

Visit [ojjdp.ojp.gov/feedback-on-priority-areas](https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/feedback-on-priority-areas) to provide feedback on the Administrator's priorities.



## Administrator Ryan's Key Priorities

- Treat children as children.
- Serve children at home, in their communities, with their families.
- Open up opportunities for young people who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

# Treat Children as Children

Children do not belong in adult courts, jails, and prisons. **Research indicates** that youth whose cases are prosecuted in adult criminal court are more likely to be rearrested and have higher recidivism rates than youth in the juvenile justice system.

**Research** also shows that the average person's brain is not fully developed until their mid-20s. Consequently, adolescents are prone to impulsive, emotional, and risk-taking behavior. These findings do not excuse youth from being held accountable for their actions however, the U.S. Supreme Court has acknowledged the effect of adolescent brain development on culpability in **cases** such as *Roper v. Simmons*, *Graham v. Florida*, *Miller v. Alabama*, and *J.D.B. v. North Carolina*.

Because their developing brains are more malleable than those of adults, young people are also more capable of change and rehabilitation. In addition, most youth naturally **age out of delinquent behavior** as they mature.

The juvenile justice field's decisionmaking must be informed by science and research to ensure young people are adjudicated fairly and given opportunities to learn and recover from youthful mistakes.



OJJDP programs and resources that help ensure children are diverted from adult courts and facilities and that provide community-based support to help them succeed include:

- **Enhancing Juvenile Indigent Defense**
- **Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts**
- **Support for Prosecutors Who Work With Youth**
- **Title II Formula Grants Program**
- **Youth Mentoring**
- **Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach** (Report)
- **Pathways to Desistance** (Bulletin Series)

# Serve Children at Home, With Their Families, in Their Own Communities

Community-based programs that involve families as a critical component enhance youth outcomes, increase public safety, and strengthen neighborhoods.

The number of youth held at state-run facilities has decreased steadily since 2001, according to [2001–2019 data](#).

These facilities are typically the most expensive to operate but have negligible public safety benefits compared to community-based programs. They are also ill equipped to address the [trauma and mental health challenges](#) that bring many young people into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Youth incarceration has several [negative outcomes](#), including association with more delinquent peers and increased criminal behavior and recidivism. Closing [underutilized juvenile correctional facilities](#) and reinvesting the savings into evidence-based programs and services keeps young people out of the system, in school, and connected to their families.

[Data from states](#) like Alabama, California, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, New York, and Texas prove that we can hold young people accountable for their actions and still give them a chance at better outcomes. Using fiscal incentives to support community-based options, each of these states significantly reduced its population of confined youth without negatively impacting public safety.



OJJDP programs and resources that strengthen and expand the use of community-based alternatives to out-of-home placement include:

- [Juvenile Justice System Reform and Reinvestment Initiative](#)
- [Community-Based Alternatives to Youth Incarceration Initiative](#)
- [Delinquency Prevention Grants Program](#)
- [Family-Based Alternative Sentencing Program](#)
- [Reducing Risk for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System](#)
- [Alternatives to Detention and Confinement](#) (Literature Review)

# Open Up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth

When youth become involved with the juvenile justice system, they typically face repercussions that extend beyond the immediate consequences. Juvenile records can adversely affect a young person's ability to continue their education, secure housing, get a job, or join the military.



These **collateral consequences** can, in turn, lead to recidivism and prolong contact with the juvenile justice system. If the mission of the juvenile justice system is truly to rehabilitate young people and protect public safety, juvenile justice practitioners must recognize and address the barriers to success that involvement with the juvenile justice system creates for youth.

## Connect With OJJDP

- Subscribe to ***OJJDP News @ a Glance***. The bimonthly newsletter features highlights of OJJDP's programs and activities, publications, training opportunities, news, and events.
- Sign up to receive **JUVJUST** notifications. This listserv emails subscribers 3 to 5 times a week with information about the latest publications, funding opportunities, training resources, and conferences.
- Like OJJDP on **Facebook**, follow us on **Twitter**, and subscribe to the OJJDP **YouTube** channel.

OJJDP programs and resources that open up opportunities for justice-involved youth and help ensure that they have the same access to opportunities that other youth have include:

- **Arts Programs for Justice-Involved Youth**
- **Second Chance Act Youth Reentry Program**
- ***Expunging Juvenile Records: Misconceptions, Collateral Consequences, and Emerging Practices*** (Bulletin)
- **Juvenile Reentry** (Literature Review)
- **Juvenile Reentry Programs** (Implementation Guide)
- ***Reentry Starts Here: A Guide for Youth in Long-Term Juvenile Corrections and Treatment Programs***