



Build Safer Communities and Stronger Kids

With More Effective Responses to Children Who Get in Trouble

An efficient and effective youth justice system holds kids accountable, helps them grow up to become contributing members of their community, and increases public safety. Kentucky has made strides in improving its youth justice system in recent years, but our state has held on to some practices that we now know do not achieve the best outcomes for kids or communities. We can respond more quickly and more effectively to get kids back on track in order to create safer communities and a stronger commonwealth.

The most effective youth justice system holds kids accountable while increasing public safety:

Utilize swift and appropriate community responses instead of detention for status offenses

Currently children end up in a detention center when a swift and intensive family intervention would be more appropriate and effective. Kentucky created the FAIR teams to work with youth charged with status offenses—things like running away or skipping school. But when the case is not successful, the child may still end up in detention, even though we know that when there is no risk to public safety, the trauma of detention only increases the chance of future offenses.

Reserve adult court for the most serious offenses

Certain cases involving youth are handled in adult court, even though evidence shows that this practice can backfire for less serious offenses and increase the likelihood of more serious offenses down the road. Limiting transfer to adult court for offenses where the behavior is directed at a person saves the most serious and costly response for the most serious cases.

Employ the most pragmatic responses to achieve what's best for youth and communities

Kentucky's current youth justice system is stuck in a single gear, when in reality, multiple gears and alternatives are available. Rightsizing our responses to youth, such as clearly defining when diversion must be used, keeping children out of court for classroom behavior, and ensuring the responses match the seriousness of the offense, including when weapons are involved, would apply the most effective response to hold youth accountable and set them on a path to success.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Build safer, stronger communities by effectively responding to kids who get in trouble in ways that put them on a path to a successful future.



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