



Build Safe Communities and Strong 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:

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 youth committing 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 cases where transfer may reduce the chance of future crime. For other offenses, the youth justice system is best suited to respond to youth and prevent future offenses.

Employ the most pragmatic responses to achieve what is best for both youth and communities

In some instances, Kentucky's current youth justice system is stuck in a single gear, when in reality, multiple gears and alternatives are available. Additionally, data tells us that within our youth justice system, some groups of children experience harsher outcomes, even though these groups do not commit more, or more serious, offenses than other children. By ensuring systems create a path to opportunity for every child and rightsizing our responses—such as specifying when diversion can be used to keep children from getting caught up in the maze of the youth justice system, addressing disproportionate outcomes for youth of color, and ensuring the responses match the seriousness of the offense—we would more effectively 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 becoming a contributing member of their community.