



Kentucky can...

Hold parents accountable in ways that minimize the impact of parental incarceration on children

Children need their parents to care for them and work to meet their basic needs. Unfortunately, in Kentucky 12 percent of children have had a parent separated from them due to incarceration—the 3rd highest rate in the nation.

Having a parent incarcerated can negatively impact a child’s behavioral, educational, and health outcomes. Even short stays in jail for a parent can create negative consequences for children and for the parent’s ability to financially support the family.

To minimize the impact on children, Kentucky needs a system of justice that holds people accountable while using incarceration for those who pose a flight risk or risk to public safety.

1. Promote community-based alternatives to incarceration for parents

For parents who have committed a nonviolent offense and do not pose a risk to public safety, Kentucky can expand sentencing options to include community-based solutions, like substance use treatment, parenting classes, vocational training, or educational services. Holding parents accountable in these ways allows them to continue caring for their children and helps them be more successful in contributing to society. When their parents are jailed, children are more likely to be placed with a relative, family friend, or in foster care – a system that is already strained.

2. Support parents in achieving sobriety while safely caring for their children

Given Kentucky’s increase in women locked up for low-level drug offenses and housed in county jails with limited access to substance use disorder treatment, expanding substance use treatment in the community would be a better intervention for mothers with drug charges and for their children.



Parental incarceration has been referred to as a “**shared sentence**” due to the short and long-term effects it has on children’s physical health, mental health, and educational achievement.

What does the data tell us?

- ➔ Due to systemic inequities within the criminal justice system, **Black children are disproportionately impacted** by having a loved one incarcerated
- ➔ Women (27 percent) are more likely than men (15 percent) to be incarcerated for a **drug offense as their most serious offense**
- ➔ Women (64 percent) who are incarcerated are **more likely to be a parent** than men (55 percent)

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Minimize the impact of parental incarceration on children by utilizing community-based alternatives to incarceration for parents who commit nonviolent offenses and releasing pregnant women with substance use disorder to treatment.