Invest in Youth — Not Prisons

By Leslie Helmcamp

Illinois can do more to help youth succeed, and save money, by increasing the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration.

Putting youth in prisons is the most expensive and least effective way to respond to juvenile delinquency. Yet Illinois spends heavily on unnecessary prison facilities to incarcerate fewer and fewer youth each year.

Instead of holding youth accountable and helping their rehabilitation, the use of incarceration has consequences that leave youth more likely to commit another crime and less likely to succeed in school, find employment, and become financially secure in the long run.¹

Because youth are still developing, community-based approaches that promote rehabilitation have been proven to help them change and improve their behavior. These approaches are less expensive and make it less likely that a youth will offend again, improving public safety.² Evidence-based therapies delivered in the community can reduce recidivism rates by more than 15 percent while helping youth remain in their community instead of isolated in prison, far from their families.³

However, punitive approaches, such as incarceration, can disrupt youth development, cutting them off from family and school, and exposing them to other harmful peer influences while in prison.⁴ More

Definitions

IDJJ (Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice) operates the state’s five youth prisons. Youth are sent to these facilities across the state, after trial and conviction.

Juvenile Detention refers to detaining youth in a secure facility or jail while they await a court hearing or trial after being arrested. There are 16 pre-trial detention centers in Illinois. The state reimburses a portion of detention and probation costs through the Administrative Office of the Courts, but does not directly fund or run detention centers.

This report analyzes the state cost of incarceration at IDJJ facilities, not the costs associated with juvenile detention.

Illinois Youth Centers (IYCs) are secure prison facilities operated by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. Youth who commit an offense between ages 13 and 18 can be sent to an IDJJ youth prison and held for an indeterminate sentence until the age of 21. There are five IYCs in Illinois. IYC Kewanee closed on July 31, 2016. IYC Murphysboro and IYC Joliet were closed in early 2013.

- IYC Warrenville – Maximum Security
- IYC Chicago and IYC St. Charles – Medium security
- IYC Harrisburg – Multiple Security Levels
- IYC Pere Marquette – Minimum Security Level

than 8 out of every 10 youths (86 percent) committed to Illinois Youth Centers (IYC) — youth prisons operated by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) — are arrested again within three years of release. More than 40 percent are incarcerated for a new offense, meaning the state spends millions of taxpayer dollars for low returns and ineffective measures that do not improve public safety.\(^5\)

Even though Illinois has mandated using incarceration only as a last resort and is reducing the number of youth it sends to prison, the state has not followed through with a set of investments to provide communities with the resources to run community-based alternatives and support youth development. The ongoing failure of the Governor Rauner and the General Assembly to agree on a state budget and needed revenues leaves many prevention and alternative programs to incarceration with too little money to be effective and cuts off youth and families from important services that keep communities safe.

If Illinois moved away from spending on large prisons that are harmful and ineffective, the state's juvenile justice system could be transformed — giving youth a better chance of leading productive lives and helping communities thrive. Here are the steps that need to be taken for that to happen:

- **Invest in community-based responses to juvenile delinquency, not prisons.**

  Illinois should increase investments in community-based programs that support youth development and rehabilitation, while closing unnecessary prison facilities and replacing the remaining system with smaller, more homelike settings closer to communities. Juvenile justice stakeholders, community members, and state and local leaders must work together so that communities have the resources needed to thrive and be safe. Illinois should prioritize funding for programs that address past trauma and abuse, provide mental health and substance use treatment, and support youth development, including after school programs, and youth educational and employment opportunities. Programs should address the cultural and linguistic needs of youth and be evaluated for their effectiveness in addressing the life experiences of all youth, especially youth of color who are more likely to be incarcerated. Closing state youth prisons that are often far from a youth's home and directing funding to community-based programs will reduce the isolation and harm created by removing a child from his or her home.

- **Fully support and expand Redeploy.**

  Illinois' state and local policy makers should fully support and expand Redeploy Illinois (Redeploy) — a community-based alternative to incarceration — with adequate levels of funding so that all communities have the resources to build programs that divert more youth away from incarceration. Although the state has increased funding for Redeploy since its inception in 2005, the lack of funding for fiscal year 2016 left 24 counties without services for youth and caused dozens of staff to lose their jobs. The state also should conduct a longitudinal study of Redeploy and other alternative programs to measure changes in recidivism and the long-term success rates for youth, including youth of color. It is important for the state to evaluate results so communities can continually improve and adapt services to address the individual needs of the youth they engage.
• **Create a dedicated state youth investment fund that redirects resources from reducing the use of incarceration toward community-based approaches.**

The money that goes into this fund should be allocated to community-based programs such as Redeploy, Comprehensive Community-Based Youth Services, restorative justice hubs, mental health programming, and community-based, evidence-backed interventions—all of which give youth a better chance to succeed and reduce the state’s reliance on detention and incarceration. The fund should include a component to focus on strengthening youth through workforce and skill development, including providing employment opportunities and access to postsecondary education and training. Other states such as Kansas and Ohio offer examples for how Illinois could structure a fund through state legislation and create a “lockbox” that directs funds saved from reducing confinement and other juvenile justice reforms to a juvenile justice improvement fund.

• **Support and improve educational and employment opportunities for youth.**

Illinois policymakers from the state’s workforce development agencies, K-12, career and technical education, state community and technical colleges, child welfare, and juvenile justice should work together to make sure the state develops a targeted strategy to improve educational and workforce development opportunities for youth who are disconnected from both school and work. Illinois should specifically target state and federal workforce funding toward summer youth employment programs, postsecondary education and training leading to a credential or degree, and drop out recovery programs to reengage youth in school and put them on a path to a career.

**Youth Incarceration is Expensive for Taxpayers**

Over the past decade, Illinois has moved in the right direction—away from using incarceration to address youth delinquency, toward recognizing that children need support, not punishment, to grow out of youthful behavior. Illinois has reduced the number of youth inside IDJJ prisons by 62 percent to 546 youth in 2016, down from 1,438 in 2007. As of July 2016, there were 395 youth at IDJJ prisons.

Despite the decline in population at IDJJ prisons, the state still continues to invest in expensive facilities. Annual incarceration costs in Illinois for one
youth are 29 times higher than what it costs to divert one youth from prison through Redeploy.\textsuperscript{7} As of 2016, the estimated average cost to incarcerate one youth is $172,000 annually, compared to an average of just $6,000 per youth through Redeploy.\textsuperscript{8}

In 2016, the state spent an estimated $119 million in total IDJJ operations, including the state’s prison facilities and the Aftercare program for recently released youth.\textsuperscript{9} This represents a decline of 12 percent or $16 million (in 2016 dollars) between 2007 and 2016 even though the state reduced the prison youth population by 62 percent and closed two prisons (three as of August 2016).\textsuperscript{10}

There has not been a comparable drop in costs due in part to needed reforms aimed at reducing violence and improving access to mental health services, among other improvements at state facilities. But even despite IDJJ efforts to improve conditions for youth, the state continues to fall short of meeting basic health and safety standards as required by law at a high cost to the state. (See \textit{Harsh and Dangerous Conditions at Youth Prisons Come at a High Cost}.)

### Harsh and Dangerous Conditions at Youth Prisons Come at a High Cost

The high cost of running Illinois’ five remaining youth prisons is plagued by problems of inadequate staffing and services required to meet health and safety standards required by law.

A 2012 lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of all youth confined at Illinois’ youth prisons cited violations of federal law, including excessive confinement, violence within the prison, sexual assault, and inadequate mental health services.\textsuperscript{1} The suit resulted in an agreement with IDJJ — also known as a consent decree — to make improvements at the prisons.

As a result of the consent decree, IDJJ’s costs for overtime and compensatory time have increased 66 percent — to $4.9 million in 2015 from $2.9 million in 2012 as facilities have worked to improve conditions for youth.\textsuperscript{2} State appropriations for IDJJ have remained relatively flat at $119 million (in 2016 dollars) from 2013 to 2016, despite a 40 percent reduction in the average number of youth incarcerated during the same time period.

Even with steps to improve conditions — including reducing the use of confinement, increasing mental health services, and improving access to educational opportunities — the prison-based model fails to improve youth success.\textsuperscript{3} These harsh conditions illustrate the urgent need for the state to close IDJJ youth prisons and reform the remaining system toward smaller settings near to a youth’s community.

\textsuperscript{2}Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, Analysis of Employee Overtime, fiscal year 2015.
Prison costs, including utilities, guard salaries, behavioral and substance use treatment, and other facility costs account for 76 percent of the IDJJ budget — $94 million per year. Mental health and substance use treatment accounts for just 2.5 percent — or $3 million — in spending at the facilities. Overall, mental health spending, including prisons, Aftercare, and school districts totaled $12.2 million or just 7 percent of the IDJJ budget.

The cost per youth has continued to rise as the need for these types of facilities declines. From 2014 to 2016 the cost per youth per year jumped 54 percent, to $172,000 from $112,000. Total fixed costs such as utilities, basic staffing, and other expenses associated with running the facilities account for 81 percent of costs on a per youth basis. The marginal costs — costs associated with one youth in a facility, including expenses such as food, clothing, supplies, medical care, and contract services — accounted for only 19 percent (approximately $33,000 in 2016).

Much of the rise in cost per youth is due to facilities operating well under capacity. In 2016, the population of youth at IDJJ prisons dropped to just 44 percent of capacity. At IYC-St. Charles — the state’s largest youth prison — it costs $26.2 million per year to incarcerate 174 youth. While the state has taken steps to reduce spending on youth prisons by closing the IYC-Kewanee facility in 2016, the Illinois Department of Corrections has announced plans to repurpose the facility into an adult prison. Repurposing the facility makes any savings on incarceration expenses less likely for the state. IDJJ estimated the state could avoid a net $14.2 million in costs during the fiscal year that started July 1, 2016 by closing the IYC-Kewanee facility.
A more effective system would be for Illinois to replace the current prison model with smaller, regional facilities that keep youth closer to home, while prioritizing more funding for mental health services and other alternatives to confinement.

Illinois Youth Prisons Below Capacity as Costs Rise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>2015 Population</th>
<th>Percent of Total Capacity</th>
<th>Per Capita Costs</th>
<th>2016 Population</th>
<th>Percent of Total Capacity</th>
<th>Per Capita Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IYC-Chicago</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>$148,906</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>$176,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC-Harrisburg</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>$135,064</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>$168,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC-Kewanee</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>$113,385</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>$163,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC-Pere Marquette</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>$164,557</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>$151,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC-St. Charles</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>$110,548</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>$150,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC-Warrenville</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>$278,737</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>$378,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Average</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>$131,335</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>$171,939</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fiscal Policy Center analysis, Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice; FY2016 figures are estimates as of June 28, 2016.
Black Youth More Likely to be Incarcerated

Black youth are incarcerated at far higher rates in Illinois than white youth. And the disparities have grown despite reduced incarceration in Illinois. Although black youth represent 17 percent of Illinois’ youth population (ages 12-17), they make up 69 percent of youth incarcerated at youth prisons across the state as of 2015, up from 56 percent in 2006. White youth make up 54 percent of the Illinois youth population (ages 12-17), and only 19 percent of all youth incarcerated, down from a third in 2006.

Although black youth are more likely to be incarcerated, it does not appear to be due to large differences in delinquent behavior between black and white youth. While some differences exist by type of crime, including violent crime, those offenses make up only a small portion of youth committed to IDJJ. And studies show that African-American youth are no more likely to report selling drugs than white youth, yet are more likely to be formally charged in drug cases.

The racial disparities of youth benefiting from reduced incarceration show that Illinois needs to do more to make sure community-based programs benefit all justice-involved youth, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Illinois can make sure community alternative approaches reach black and Hispanic youth, especially in areas of concentrated poverty where scarce resources exist. Investment in these communities, along with a sustained effort to promote cultural and linguistic competency in programming, are the first steps to promote success for youth of color.

Treating Youth in the Community Improves Their Chances, Promotes Public Safety

The use of inappropriate punitive measures such as detention and incarceration can have harmful effects on young people, setting back their development and rehabilitation. And kids returning from prison are more likely to reoffend than youth engaged in community-based programs closer to their home.

Young people differ from adults in key aspects of their ability to assess risk, respond to peer influences, and make responsible decisions. Youth also differ in how they respond and cope with trauma and abuse. These differences in adolescent brain development require different approaches to addressing youth delinquency.

Community-based programs that use positive youth development approaches — systems that build on a young person’s strengths — are an important part of youth rehabilitation. Ensuring that programs focus on high school completion, job training, and other key milestones are features of community-based programs that guide youth in making better decisions and practicing new skills and coping techniques within their communities. Restorative justice hubs provide another option for community involvement in holding youth accountable and resolving conflicts collectively through community-led conferences, victim-offender mediation, and peacemaking circles.

Programs that deliver treatment within the community can have better results at reducing recidivism compared to institutional settings. An Ohio study found that youth served through a community-based alternative program for justice-involved youth had lower rates of recidivism compared to those in prison-based settings. After controlling for variables such as crime, low- and medium-risk offenders who received treatment in the community had recidivism rates two to six times lower than those who were incarcerated. For high-risk offenders, there was no difference in recidivism rates between community-based treatment and incarceration, despite the far higher cost of incarceration. Only incarcerating the very highest-risk offenders produced a public safety benefit.

Other standardized treatments delivered as intensive supports within the community are effective at treating youth and reducing recidivism. For example, in a Washington state study, treatments involving the family, including Functional Family Therapy — which focuses on reducing negative interactions and dysfunction in the family — reduced recidivism by 15.9 percent. And Multisystemic Therapy — which supports youth in a variety of settings, including school, community, and home — reduced recidivism by 10.5 percent. And, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the most effective substance use treatment for youth requires family involvement.

Illinois’ Community-Based Programs Cost Less and Do Better

Redeploy Illinois incorporates many of the standardized treatments and positive youth development approaches through local programs that address juvenile delinquency. Instead of locking up youth, Redeploy operates programs in the community to address a youth’s mental
health needs, substance use condition, past trauma, abuse and neglect, and other financial or family needs that may contribute to their delinquent behavior.

Results from Redeploy have been very positive. One evaluation showed successful participants in the program had a 27 percent lower recidivism rate compared to those who did not complete the program. Counties have also seen the number of youth sent to IDJJ decline over the life of their programs. St. Clair County’s Redeploy program reduced the number of youth sent to IDJJ by 78 percent — to 152 in 2014, from 678 in 2005. Overall, Redeploy estimates that participating counties reduced the number of commitments to prison by 58 percent or nearly 1,800 youth, avoiding an estimated $88 million in incarceration costs between 2005 and 2014.

In fiscal year 2015, Illinois spent $4.8 million for Redeploy, which is a small fraction — roughly 5 percent — of the $95 million spent to operate the state’s six youth prisons. In 2014, Redeploy accepted 483 youth into the program. The cost per youth varies between $3,000 and $10,000 annually, with an average cost of $6,000. With each youth served in the community, the state avoids spending tens of thousands of dollars on unnecessary and ineffective incarceration.

Prevention programs such as Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services (CCBYS) provide youth in crisis — who are locked out of their homes or have left due to a family crisis — with a 24-hour hotline to help them through a crisis. CCBYS programs typically provide services for roughly three months at an average cost of just $1,800 per youth. Past investments in this critical program have prevented thousands of Illinois youth from entering the child welfare system or the juvenile justice system. Through crisis intervention services, emergency housing, counseling, and case management, these community-based programs have helped youth reunite with their families and avoid unnecessary arrest, incarceration, or involvement in the child welfare system.

Backtracking on the State’s Progress

The failure to agree upon a state budget threatens Illinois’ progress on moving away from a punitive model using incarceration to one focused on treatment and rehabilitation. State policymakers have funded a costly juvenile corrections system at the expense of public safety, draining resources needed for important investments in prevention and rehabilitation services.

And with the recent budget impasse, Redeploy and many of the programs intended to improve public safety and help rehabilitate young offenders went without funding, leaving more youth at risk of entering the juvenile justice system, hurting families, and driving up state costs. Even with the passage of the “stopgap” budget at the end of June 2016, uncertainty for many programs that have scaled back or closed altogether remains. To restore programs and strengthen youth and their communities, Illinois lawmakers and the governor must raise the resources necessary to solve the state’s ongoing fiscal crisis. (See Appendix 1: Dismantling Youth Alternative & Prevention Programs in the 2016 State Budget Impasse.)

2 Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, *Raising the Age of the Juvenile Court Jurisdiction*.

3 Elizabeth Drake, *Evidence-Based Juvenile Offender Programs: Program Description, Quality Assurance, and Cost*, Washington Institute for Public Policy, 2007. Web: http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/986; and JPI, See note 1. Note: Some evidence-based treatments can reduce recidivism up to 22 percent or more. In this report, we provide outcomes for Multi-systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy.

4 James Snyder, *Peer deviancy training and peer coercion: dual processes associated with early-onset conduct problems*, “Child Development, 2008: March-April 79 (2):252-67). This study found that when young people are confined, they are more likely to be subject to peer influences because of “peer-deviancy training” where they adapt and learn new delinquent skills from their peers.


10 Comptroller, IDJJ and Budget Book, See note 9.


12 FPC analysis, IDJJ data request, June 2016.

13 IDJJ data request, See note 12.

14 FPC analysis, IDJJ data request, June 2016.

15 IDJJ, *Recommendation for the Closure of Illinois Youth Center-Kewanee, Response to the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, March 18, 2016*, http://cgfa.ilga.gov/upload/KewaneeFYCrecommendation.pdf. Note: IDJJ states that any delay in closure would diminish the savings from closing the facility. Currently, the Illinois Department of Corrections and the governor’s office have announced that Kewanee will be repurposed into an adult prison. The facility closed on July 31, 2016.

16 IDJJ announced its plan to move forward with closing Kewanee effective July 1, 2016. The facility completed closure on July 31, 2016.


23 Lowenkamp, See note 23.

24 Lowenkamp, See note 23.

25 Elizabeth Drake, See note 3.


28 Redeploy, See note 29.

29 Redeploy, See note 29.

30 State appropriations for Redeploy Illinois: $4,885,100 in FY2014; $4,775,200 in FY2015. State appropriations for IDJJ total operations were approximately $95,000,000 in both FY2014 and FY2015.

31 Redeploy, See note 29.

32 Redeploy, See note 29.

33 Redeploy, See note 29.
### Appendix 1: Dismantling Youth Alternative & Prevention Programs in the State Budget Impasse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th># of Youth</th>
<th>Counties/Region</th>
<th>Annual Cost Per Youth</th>
<th>Unmet Need Prior to Budget Impasse</th>
<th>FY2015 Funding</th>
<th>FY2016 Funding</th>
<th>June 2016 Stopgap Funds to Cover 7/2015 to 12/2016 Expenses</th>
<th>Amount Remaining for FY17* After Paying FY16 Expenses</th>
<th>Impact During Budget Impasse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redeploy</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>46 counties (Out of 102 counties)</td>
<td>$3K-$10K</td>
<td>Cook and 55 counties statewide have not had access to Redeploy Services</td>
<td>$4.8M</td>
<td>$4.8M</td>
<td>$122K</td>
<td>-$122K</td>
<td>24 counties that previously served 285 youth in FY2015 lost services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Community Based Services (CCBYS)</td>
<td>7,020</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>Juvenile justice reforms have increased the need for CCYBS services</td>
<td>$16.5M</td>
<td>$16.1M</td>
<td>$414K</td>
<td>-$414K</td>
<td>More than half of CCBYS providers reduced services-roughly 7,000 youth affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeenREACH</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>433K IL children are unsupervised after school</td>
<td>$13M</td>
<td>$13.2M</td>
<td>18 months (No expenses recorded in FY2016)</td>
<td>$13.2M</td>
<td>18 programs closed, 94 staff laid off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth Services (includes housing &amp; other services)</td>
<td>2,798</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>$1,903</td>
<td>2,530 youth turned away in 2015 and an estimated 93% of homeless youth are unable to access services</td>
<td>$5.5M</td>
<td>$5.4M</td>
<td>$886K</td>
<td>90% of programs reduced or eliminated services for existing clients, instituted waitlists, laid off staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Youth Services (basic needs/referrals)</td>
<td>3,958</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>$732</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The stopgap budget is intended to cover expenses over an 18-month period from July 2015-December 2016. The remaining funds after FY2016 expenses are the funds available to cover the first six months of FY2017.*

ABOUT THE FISCAL POLICY CENTER

The Fiscal Policy Center at Voices for Illinois Children provides timely, credible, and accessible information and analysis on fiscal issues that affect children, families, and communities in Illinois. The FPC is a member of the State Priorities Project, a network of nonprofit organizations in more than 40 states. The Project is coordinated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C.-based research organization and strategic policy institute that works on a range of federal and state issues.

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