

# Juvenile Justice Reform in Pennsylvania

## *Improving Outcomes for Youth, Communities, and Taxpayers*

In December 2019, state leaders established the bipartisan, interbranch Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force. The 30-member Task Force conducted a comprehensive data-driven assessment of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system and developed 35 recommendations to serve as the foundation for budgetary, legislative, and administrative changes for consideration during the 2021-22 session.

### Juvenile Justice Task Force Findings

**Research shows that most youth are not on a path to adult crime, and over-involvement in the juvenile justice system can increase their likelihood of reoffending.**

- 60% of youth enter PA's juvenile justice system for a first time offense, and more than half are low-risk.
- Providing a community-based response is the best way to get most young people back on track and support future success in the workforce.

**Pennsylvania underutilizes effective interventions like diversion, which offers kids opportunities to stay in school, seek employment, or participate in job readiness activities.**

- Research shows diversion from the juvenile justice system leads to better public safety outcomes than formal adjudication, and more than 80% of diversions in PA are successfully completed.
- Whether young people receive the opportunity for diversion often depends on where in PA they live.

**Out-of-home placement consumes the vast majority of taxpayer spending on juvenile justice – even though community-based services for youth are generally more effective.**

- Removing a young person from their home and putting them in out-of-home placement costs as much as \$192,720 per youth per year, nearly 50 times the cost of high-quality effective family therapy.
- On average, young people are kept in placement for 16 months, moving through six different facilities.

### Key Legislative Recommendations

**Streamline Expungement** of juvenile records and prioritize funding for juvenile programs.

*SB 1226 and SB 1228 by Baker, Costa, and Santarsiero referred to Judiciary*

**Expand Diversion,** limit detention and out-of-home placement, and tailor restitution.

*SB 1241 by Bartolotta and A. Williams referred to Judiciary*

**Eliminate Fines** and fees to keep kids from being pulled deeper into the juvenile justice system.

*SB 1233 by Yaw and Cappelletti referred to Judiciary*

**End Direct File** and keep most kids in the juvenile system rather than trying them as adults.

*SB 1240 by Bartolotta and A. Williams referred to Judiciary*

**Reinvest Savings** from reduced placement use and strengthen system oversight.

*Pending legislation by Argall and Street planned for referral to State Government*

**Protect System-Involved Youth** with a permanent Child Advocate and other guidelines.

*SB 1227 and SB 1229 by Baker, Costa, and Santarsiero and more referred to Aging & Youth*

**Increase Oversight** of out-of-home placements and prohibit harmful practices in facilities.

*Legislation planned for referral to Health & Human Services*

**Expand School-Based Diversion** and ensure school stability for justice-involved youth.

*Legislation planned for referral to Education*

*Recommended by the*  
**Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force**