

Successful programs in Illinois, Ohio reflect national trend in state juvenile justice systems

One of the more dramatic trends in state criminal justice systems has been the decade-long drop in the rate of young people in juvenile confinement, due in part to policy changes made across the country.

Jake Horowitz, state policy director for the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project, says those changes reflect concerns about both the high cost of locking up young offenders (estimated to be as much as \$100,000 per year) and the ineffectiveness of confinement.

As a 2013 Pew report notes: "Many policymakers believe that expense would be justified if it improved public safety, but research has demonstrated that residential placements generally fail to produce better outcomes than alternative sanctions, cost much more, and can actually increase reoffending for certain youth."

Between 1997 and 2013, the study found, U.S. juvenile confinement rates fell by 48 percent.

Meanwhile, states such as Ohio and Illinois have reported success in implementing alternatives to incarceration.

RECLAIM Ohio, first launched in 1994, helps steer youth offenders to community-based alternatives to lockup by providing local governments with an incentive to supervise youth in communities.

"Usually the public safety and fiscal goals of states and counties are not particularly well aligned," Horowitz says. "If a county does a great job [in managing a youth], they don't get additional dollars from the state. But if they send kids to the state system, it is free to the counties."

But with RECLAIM, the state offers Ohio counties funding for managing youth cases locally (exceptions are made for youths charged with certain serious offenses). Between 1994 and 2013, counties received more than \$500 million from the state to support community-based services.

"What this has led to is a very big reduction in the number of kids who spend time in residential facilities, and it's saved the state a lot of money," Horowitz says. "Juvenile crime has plummeted."

Illinois adopted a program similar to RECLAIM Ohio in 2005. Under Redeploy Illinois, counties that agree to adhere to a 25 percent reduction in commitments to state facilities receive a financial incentive. Illinois youths who are diverted to community programs receive services such as counseling, substance-abuse and mental-health treatment, and skills training.

According to a 2010 analysis, eight Redeploy sites achieved a 53 percent diversion rate from state lockup to locally based programs, accounting for a savings of \$9 million for Illinois.

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