



**Serving Non-violent Youthful Offenders in Their Communities:
The Costs and Benefits of a More Effective Juvenile Justice System for Arkansas**

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SAVING LIVES AND SAVING MONEY

The state spends \$29.5 million annually for confining youth committed to the custody of the Department of Human Services Division of Youth Services (DHS DYS), the agency that operates the state's secure confinement facilities for youth.¹ The recidivism rate for kids in Arkansas's secure correctional facilities is 46.5 percent.²

While some youthful offenders pose a serious threat to public safety and must be confined, most do not. Using secure confinement to lock up youth who do not pose a serious threat is a waste of taxpayers' money and diminishes the likelihood of rehabilitation and a brighter future for young offenders.

Eighty percent of youth incarcerated at an Arkansas correctional facility from 2009 to 2011³ were deemed to be a low or moderate risk to public safety. There is ample evidence that using secure confinement for low- or moderate-risk youthful offenders is not cost-effective and it's not achieving the results desired when compared to proven-effective community alternatives.⁴

Arkansas has already shown its capacity to reduce secure confinement of low-risk offenders, save money, and reinvest the savings in more effective programs. Overall commitments, commitments for misdemeanor convictions, and length of stay for secure confinement have all been reduced in the past three years. This was achieved by making better use of local community-based programs to serve low- and moderate-risk offenders as an alternative to incarceration.

Arkansas can achieve even greater cost savings and improved outcomes for rehabilitated youth. This brief summarizes findings from model programs from other states, as well as the results of a cost benefit analysis comparing community-based programs to incarceration of young offenders.

Q&A

HOW MANY YOUTH ARE INCARCERATED ANNUALLY IN ARKANSAS?

In FY2012, 496 youth offenders in Arkansas were committed to a secure facility.

WHAT IS THE COST OF SECURE CONFINEMENT OF YOUTH?

Locking up youth in the Arkansas Juvenile Assessment and Treatment Center (AJATC), the state's largest and most secure correctional facility, costs \$9.9 million annually. The total costs of secure confinement in all state facilities in Arkansas are \$29.5 million annually.

WHAT IS THE RECIDIVISM RATE FOR YOUTH PLACED IN SECURE CONFINEMENT?

Of those incarcerated, 46.5 percent will be convicted of a crime in the future.

WHAT IS THE RISK TO PUBLIC SAFETY OF YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS COMMITTED TO SECURE CONFINEMENT?

The latest DYS annual report indicates that 36 percent of incarcerated youth had committed misdemeanor offenses.⁵ Assessments of youth committed during the past three years indicate that 11 percent were classified as low-risk, 69 percent as moderate-risk, and 20 percent as high-risk.⁶

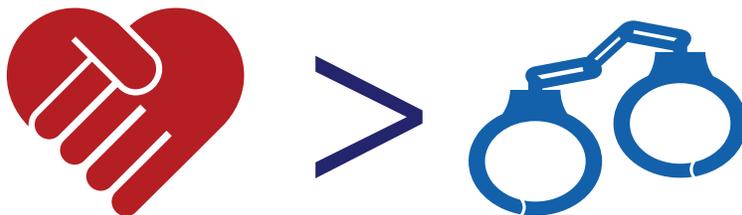
IS ARKANSAS MAKING PROGRESS IN HOW IT DEALS WITH YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS?

Yes. From 2008 through 2011, overall commitments to state custody were down by 20 percent, and commitments for misdemeanor-level offender behavior decreased by 24 percent. In that same period, the average length of stay in state treatment centers went from 265 days to 175 days, and the number of beds at the AJATC was reduced from 143 to 100.⁷ In 2010, DYS utilized a combination of federal stimulus money and state revenue to implement a commitment-reduction program that provided incentives to local jurisdictions that participated and had some measure of success. Recently the U.S. Department of Justice, after nearly 10 years of federal court oversight of the AJATC, determined that it was no longer necessary.

GUIDEPOSTS TO BETTER OUTCOMES AND SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS

A recent national report addressed what it called the six pervasive flaws in the longstanding heavy reliance on large, prison-like correctional facilities for youth offenders. These facilities are frequently: dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful, and inadequate. It also established that the overuse of secure confinement is a counterproductive policy that continues in spite of conclusive evidence that other approaches will provide equal or far better results at a fraction of the cost.⁸

Other states have shown that positive behavior changes in juvenile youthful offenders are more likely to occur as a result of proven, effective community interventions than from incarceration. While reform of the adult criminal is more difficult, studies show that a high percentage of youthful criminality – especially misdemeanor and non-violent offenses – can be curtailed and recidivism decreased as a result of a programmed intervention.⁹



These reforms can cut costs and save money, but it is important to understand exactly how. Such calculations aid reform efforts to reallocate state and community resources from incarceration to youth programs that meet individual youth needs in local communities.¹⁰ Reforms have produced fiscal savings in Ohio, Illinois, Texas, North Carolina, Washington, and Michigan.¹¹

While the need for juvenile justice reform is gaining in popularity, policy makers have lacked critical information about proven practices as well as comparative costs and benefits to answer key questions such as: *How would different approaches impact the state's budget for rehabilitation of youthful offenders? And, if cost savings are achieved, how much money may be available for more effective alternatives that help young offenders become reestablished in their communities?*

To answer these types of questions, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF) asked HISTECON Associates, Inc. to conduct a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to determine the major cost shifts that would occur for the state if further reforms to reduce the reliance on secure confinement take place.¹² The CBA model allows analysts and policy makers to think about juvenile justice alternatives in a real-dollar comparison and to evaluate the outcomes in terms of public safety as well as the benefits to troubled youth that these programs would serve. In effect, the CBA allows lawmakers to weigh multiple options and determine which would achieve the most positive results for the least cost.¹³

In Arkansas, a recent report indicated that minor policy changes like restructuring the commitment criteria for misdemeanors or reducing delays in providing assessments for arrested youth could net the state savings between \$1 million and \$9 million annually, depending on the option chosen.¹⁴ The CBA complements these findings by calculating the long-term fiscal benefits to be accrued by the state for each young offender who, rather than being placed in secure confinement, participates in an effective community-based alternative intervention.

The CBA calculated the current costs of arrest, detention, court adjudication, confinement in a secure facility, and the aftercare services that follow confinement. Cost calculations were also done to calculate the cost of arrest, detention, court adjudication and placement in a proven-effective community-based alternative program.

For the purpose of this CBA, two proven, effective community-based programs, the Youth Advocate (YAP) and the Multi Systemic Therapy (MST) program, were included in the cost estimate. YAP provides six months of support services coupled with almost daily access to an adult mentor. MST provides home-based services from a trained professional who addresses both the youth and parental needs in the home, at school, or in the community. While there may be other effective programs currently being utilized in Arkansas, these two were chosen for the CBA because they have been subjected to evaluation in recent years and have proven to be effective. For purposes of the CBA, the cost (\$4,118) is a composite of both these programs, although they are designed for different populations and have a range of costs.

Community based programs are significantly less expensive and more effective than traditional ap-

proaches relying on secure confinement. The cost and recidivism rates for the two scenarios are illustrated below.

Description	Cost	Recidivism Rate
Youth is arrested, placed in detention, adjudicated by the court, placed for six months in secure confinement, and completes six months of re-retry services.	\$45,904	46.5*
Youth is arrested, placed in detention, adjudicated by the court, placed in a proven-effective community based program for six months.	\$4,118	40.6

*This rate is based on the actual number of youth in Arkansas who successfully complete the treatment plan and aftercare program while in DYS custody and who then reoffend and end up committed to DYS or the Department of Correction within three years.

There is \$41,786 savings realized by use of the community-based alternative and a six percent decrease in recidivism. The initial savings from using a less costly program, coupled with \$171, 245 in long-term benefits describe above, produces a total cost-benefit of \$213,031 for each youth who successfully completes the community-based alternative to secure confinement and is therefore more likely to avoid re-offending.

The benefits of the community-based program included savings from the use of these lower-cost alternatives to incarceration, the improved likelihood of success (lower recidivism), and the long-term benefits that result from lower crime rate described below:¹⁵

- Taxpayer benefits: \$38,880. Savings from reductions in future arrest (\$585), adjudication (\$430), adult jail time (\$9,110), prison time (\$28,058), and judicial supervision (\$697).
- Victim benefits: \$12,855. Based on analysis of the possible benefits for future victims who are not wronged by a future, potential offender.
- Youthful offender benefits: \$119,510. Based on research that confirms 13 percent higher earnings, annual earnings increases, lower unemployment, and inflation over the lifetime of the youth.

Estimated total benefits: \$171,245 per youth completing the proven-effective community-based program.

CONCLUSION

It is now time to continue to build on Arkansas's success in addressing what were once longstanding problems in the juvenile justice system and reducing the costly and inhumane practices of the past. Due to tight budget restraints on the federal and state level, Arkansas's commitment reduction program has been significantly reduced, and commitments have increased by three percent. Resources for community-based alternatives to secure confinement must be obtained elsewhere. A system must be put in place that encourages the use of effective community programs, rewards those communities that reduce incarceration, and takes the savings from those reductions to re-invest back into the community to prevent future inappropriate use of secure confinement.

Reformers of the Arkansas juvenile justice system recognize that kids who commit crimes should be held accountable for their actions, serve a reasonable punishment that fits the crime, and make things right with the victim. But the reality is that almost every young offender will be released from custody; if we want to reduce crime in our neighborhoods and protect people from repeat offenders, we need to break the cycle of crime. The best way to do that is to require kids who commit crimes to complete rigorous, mandatory rehabilitation programs such as education, counseling, job training, and drug treatment so they become productive members of society, not repeat offenders. Arkansas youth are best served by proven, effective programs in local communities where parents can participate, school is not interrupted, and community supports can be put in place to sustain the youth and their family as they move toward success. This approach saves lives and money.

Notes

¹ Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Youth Services, State Fiscal Year 2012. The total cost of all staff and/or mechanical secure correctional, residential and specialized programs for committed youth.

² This rate is based on the actual number of youth in Arkansas who successfully completed the treatment plan and aftercare program while in DYS custody and then reoffend and is committed to DYS or the Department of Correction within three years. This is the average rate for those released from DYS custody in 2006-2009 for which three years of follow up data are available.

³ Arthur, P and Hartney, C. Arkansas Youth Justice: The Architecture of Reform 2012, page 14
http://www.youthlaw.org/publications/arkansas_youth_justice_the_architecture_of_reform/ This is a three year-average for committed youth with complete assessments for the years 2009 to 2011.

⁴ Douglas W. Nelson, "Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform" Kids Count Data Book, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008; available on-line at www.aecf.org. See also "Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence," Issue Brief No. 3, MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, 2006; available on-line at www.adjj.org/downloads/6093issue_brief_3.pdf.

⁵ Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Youth Services Report Card July 2011- June 2012 page 4

⁶ Arthur, P and Hartney, C. Arkansas Youth Justice: The Architecture of Reform 2012, page 14
http://www.youthlaw.org/publications/arkansas_youth_justice_the_architecture_of_reform/

⁷ Ibid, page 15

⁸ No Place for Kids: The Case for reducing Juvenile Incarceration, Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011

⁹ Mark W. Lipsey, et al, "Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice," Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University, December 2010. For examples of these intervention programs, see the evaluation of the YAP project: Mary Parker et al, "Arkansas Youth Advocacy Program Model Pilot Project: 2010/2011 Evaluation," Department of Criminal Justice, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, August 2011.

¹⁰ Pat Arthur and Tim Roche, "Juvenile Justice Reform in Arkansas: Building a Better Future for Youth, Their Families, and the Community," a report in collaboration with the Arkansas Division of Youth Services, May 2008.

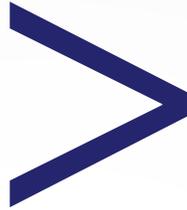
¹¹ Jeffrey A. Butts and Douglas N. Evans, "Resolution, Reinvestment, and Realignment: Three Strategies for Changing Juvenile Justice," John Jay College of Criminal Justice, September 2011. See also, S. Aos and E. Drake, WSIPP's Benefit-Cost Tool for States: Examining Policy Options in Sentencing and Corrections, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, August 2010.

¹² Cost Benefit Analysis of Arkansas Juvenile Justice Reforms, HISTECON Associates, Inc., August 2012

¹³ Cost-Benefit Analysis of Juvenile Justice Programs, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011

¹⁴ Arthur and Hartney, 2012.

¹⁵ Ibid, Cost Benefit Analysis of Arkansas Juvenile Justice Reforms, Pages 35 and 36



35 YEARS

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