

Juvenile Justice

Juvenile Lockup v. Community-Based Alternatives:

Most Arkansas youth who enter the juvenile system are at low or moderate risk of posing physical harm to others. Holding youth in juvenile lockups, especially for extended periods of time, is bad for their well-being and endangers their physical safety and mental health. It also increases the likelihood they will reoffend and later enter the correctional system as adults.

High quality, evidence-based community programs are more affordable than locking kids up, more effective in improving their long-term outcomes, and better at ensuring public safety. In 2019, Arkansas passed comprehensive juvenile justice reform, Act 189, which has the overarching goal of keeping kids out of lockups and providing them the support and services they need in their communities. The success of the reform act will depend on how it is funded and implemented.

Juvenile Court Fees and Fines: Arkansas juvenile court judges have significant authority to levy fees and fines on families with children in the juvenile justice system. Fees and fines have a disproportionate economic impact on low-income families, BIPOC families, and families from rural communities. This increases the likelihood of children from these

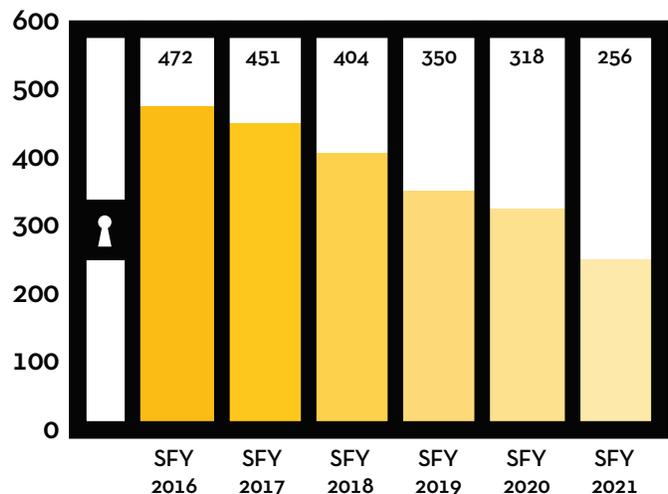
families being put in the juvenile justice system. And fines and fees undermine the goals of the juvenile justice system in many other ways. An emerging national trend has been to limit the use of fees and fines.

What to Ask Candidates

- How would you ensure the state prioritizes community-based alternatives instead of new jail beds for juveniles?
- How would you ensure that developmentally appropriate, evidence-based community services are available for children in every region of the state?
- How would you hold juvenile judges, providers, and DYS accountable for their decisions and actions?
- How would you monitor the implementation and impact of Act 189, the state’s major juvenile justice reform law, on Arkansas youth?
- How would you ensure that Arkansas can track the levying of juvenile court fees and fines and their impacts on children in the juvenile justice system and their families?



Number of Children Committed to Youth Services



Source: DHS Annual Statistical Reports for SFY21 and SFY19
<https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/data-reports/statistical-reports/>