

# Promoting Justice for Youth in Louisiana

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# Presentation Overview

- Louisiana Youth in Crisis
- Current State of Youth Justice
- Recommendations
  - Close facilities and reduce youth incarceration
  - Invest in community-based strategies that work
  - Increase transparency, accountability, and oversight
- Q&A/Discussion

Louisiana Youth Are in Crisis

# Young People in Louisiana Are In Crisis

- Annie E. Casey's 2021 Kids Count report ranked Louisiana 48<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in overall child wellbeing
- A 2020 Save the Children report ranked Louisiana the worst in the nation on efforts to prioritize and protect children
- 1 in 4 children in Louisiana live in poverty and 1 in 5 live in a high poverty area

**Sources:** The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). *2021 Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore, MD; Save the Children. (2020). *The Land of Inopportunity: Closing the Childhood Equity Gap for America's Kids*. Fairfield, CT; Bennett, Brad. "SPLC sues Louisiana for 'nonexistent' mental health services for Medicaid-eligible children and families." November 7, 2019.

# 2019 SPLC Class Action Lawsuit

*[The Louisiana Department of Health has] implemented a fragmented, inadequate, and uncoordinated mental health system for Louisiana Medicaid children and youth with gaps in service coverage, availability, and accessibility; a lack of coordination between and among behavioral health providers and child-serving systems; and minimal medication management with infrequent counseling. Resultantly, Plaintiffs and the Class deteriorate in their homes and/or cycle in and out of emergency rooms and psychiatric facilities away from their families and communities. Their conditions either worsen or do not improve, and they become unnecessarily institutionalized or at serious risk thereof. This cycle, by itself, is traumatic for these children.*

**Sources:** A.A., B.B., C.C., D.D., and E.E. vs. Rebekah Gee in her official capacity as Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, and the Louisiana Department of Health (US District Court) [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/aavgee\\_filed.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/aavgee_filed.pdf)

# Service Gaps Disproportionately Impact Youth of Color

- Black residents are 2x as likely to be in poverty than white residents
- 1 in 7 children in Louisiana has an incarcerated parent
- Black children are more than 2x as likely to be suspended or expelled than to be in advanced placement courses in Louisiana

**Sources:** Center for American Progress. (2020). Talk Poverty: Louisiana 2020 Report; South Poverty Law Center. (2021). Cut Off From Caregivers: The Children of Incarcerated Parents in Louisiana; Groeger, Lena V., Annie Waldman, and David Eads. "Miseducation: Louisiana." (October 16, 2018). ProPublica.

# The Current State of Youth Justice in Louisiana

# Louisiana Youth Prisons Are Violent and Dangerous

**Violence, abuse, and escapes plague the juvenile justice system in Louisiana**

By [Natasha Robin](#)

Published: May. 4, 2022 at 12:00 AM EDT

**Violence at Louisiana's youth detention centers prompts state investigation**

BY: [JULIE O'DONOGHUE](#) - FEBRUARY 23, 2022 9:42 AM



**7 arrested, \$35k in damage caused in fight at Swanson Center for Youth**

By [Matthew Segura](#)

Published: May. 25, 2022 at 10:36 AM EDT

**“No Light. No Nothing.” Inside Louisiana’s Harshest Juvenile Lockup**

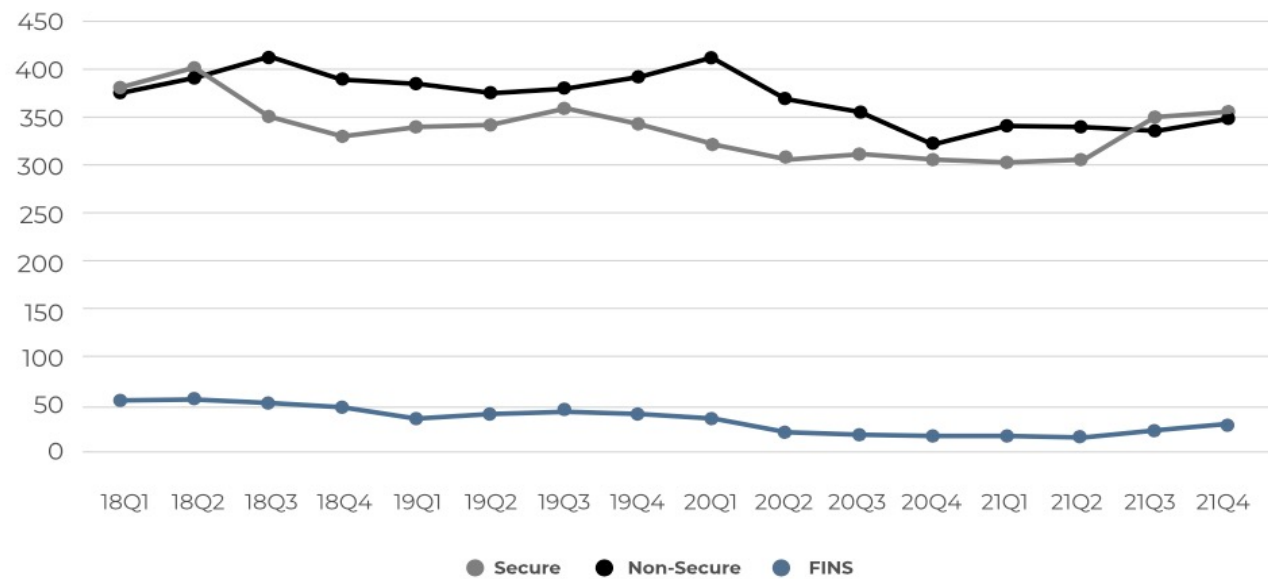
Teens at the Acadiana Center for Youth at St. Martinville were held in solitary confinement around the clock, shackled with leg irons and deprived of an education. “This is child abuse,” one expert said.

**BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL**, The Marshall Project; Erin Einhorn, NBC News; and Annie Waldman, ProPublica



# Hundreds of Young People are Incarcerated

Figure 1. Number of Youth Held in Secure and Non-Secure State Placements and Those Incarcerated on FINS Charges Only

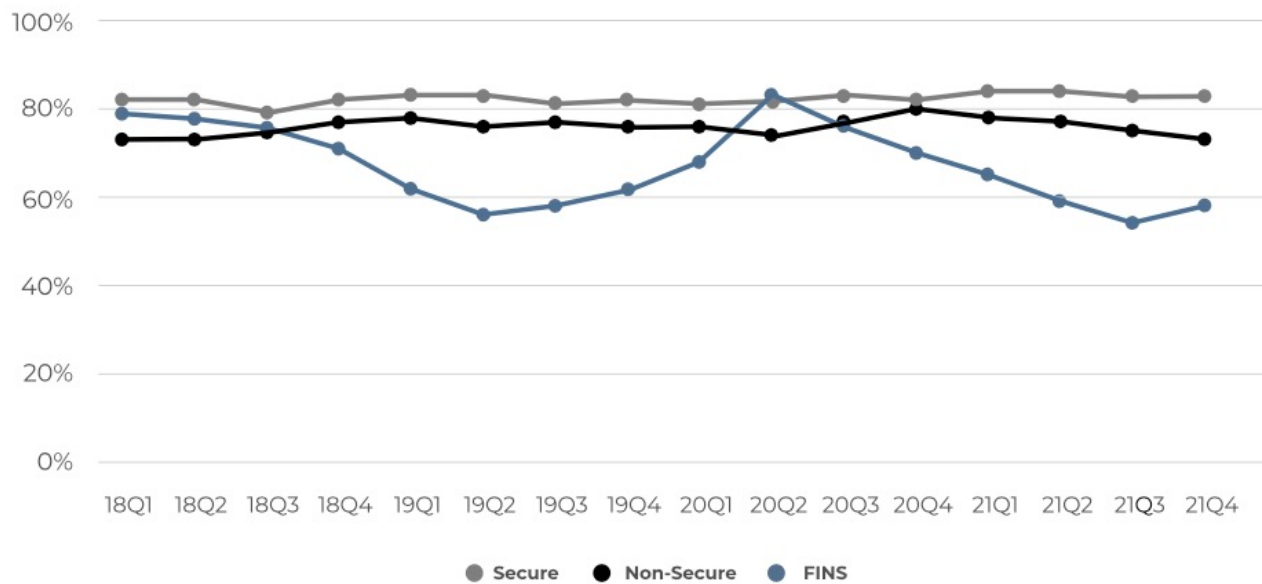


**Source:** OJJ Quarterly Indicators, 2018-2021

**Note:** FINS kids are tracked separately. They are housed in both secure and non-secure settings.

# Significant Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist

Figure 2. Proportion of Youth in Custody Who Were Black



**Source:** OJJ Quarterly Indicators, 2018-2021

**Note:** FINS kids are tracked separately. They are housed in both secure and non-secure settings.

# Youth Are Incarcerated for Long Periods of Time for Non-Offenses

Table 1. Average Length of Stay for Youth Released Between 2015 – 2017 in Days.

| Fiscal Year | Secure | Non-Secure | FINS  |
|-------------|--------|------------|-------|
| 2015        | 322.5  | 245.8      | 248.5 |
| 2016        | 366.8  | 258        | 276.6 |
| 2017        | 387.9  | 251.5      | 243.9 |

**Source:** Act 499 OJJ Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report of Youth Served, p.19

# Facilities are Expensive and Outcomes are Poor

One year in youth **prison** = **\$156,570**

One year at **LSU** = **\$24,768**

Table 2. Recidivism for Youth Released Between 2013 and 2016

|         | Secure      |             |             | NonSecure   |             |             |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|         | 1 Year Rate | 2 Year Rate | 3 Year Rate | 1 Year Rate | 2 Year Rate | 3 Year Rate |
| FY 2017 | 18%         | 29%         | 36%         | 21%         | 34%         | 41%         |
| FY 2018 | 17%         | 29%         | n/a         | 16%         | 29%         | n/a         |
| FY 2019 | 15%         | n/a         | n/a         | 22%         | n/a         | n/a         |

**Source:** Louisiana OJJ 2020 Recidivism Report

Recommendations: Policy  
Priorities for Promoting  
Justice for Youth in Louisiana

# Close facilities and significantly decrease youth incarceration

- Closing facilities and decreasing youth incarceration allows Louisiana to address violent, dangerous practices in facilities and be more cost-effective.
  - The negative outcomes for youth and communities stemming from youth incarceration comes at a high cost to taxpayers.
  - Louisiana has a well-documented history of violence and harm in youth incarceration facilities.
- The money used to incarcerate youth can be invested in approaches and interventions that are more cost-effective and protect youth from harmful practices.

# How to close facilities and significantly decrease youth incarceration

- Reduce the number of youth in secure and non-secure care.
- Reduce the length of stay in facilities.
- Invest in front-end assessment centers.
- Fund credible messenger mentoring programs.
- Implement improved probation strategies to increase successful probation completions and reduce pathways to custody through violations.

# Invest in comprehensive continuum of care in community for kids and families

- Many jurisdictions have recognized the efficacy of community-based strategies to prevent, intervene and respond to harmful youth behavior.
- However, building a continuum of care requires substantial investment.
- Many jurisdictions have found creative ways to begin to build this continuum of care for kids and families.



## How to invest in comprehensive continuum of care in community for kids and families

- Capture and redirect savings from reduced youth incarceration and facility closure.
- Maximize existing state and federal funding opportunities.
- Encourage JJRAIC or other stakeholders to outreach and respond to requests for proposals.
- Build relationships and partnerships across agencies.

# Increase transparency, accountability and oversight

- Sharing an understanding of the problems and successes of youth justice across stakeholders is critically important.
- In order to know what is working or not, a clear understanding of key metrics, experiences of youth and staff involved in the system, and the latest research and successful approaches from across the country are needed.

# How to increase transparency, accountability and oversight

- Require and fund regular data collection and reporting.
- Regularly conduct data collection and fact-finding with youth and families directly impacted by the youth justice system.
- Support local and statewide convenings to gather stakeholders together to learn about the latest in youth justice research and trends.
- Incentivize people at the local level to regularly meet, share information, and implement improved approaches to youth justice.

# Q&A/Discussion

# Thank you!

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