



Fighting for Louisiana's Incarcerated Youth

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) opposes treating minors as adults, particularly in the criminal legal system context where Black youth are disproportionately impacted. Prisons are no place for children. State resources should be allocated to prevention and rehabilitation, not punishment and incarceration. Research shows that incarcerating youth is not only harmful to the mental and physical well-being of young people, but it actively undermines public safety by increasing future recidivism and reducing future employment and educational opportunities. In contrast, providing rehabilitation and opportunities to young people reduces the likelihood that they will be arrested in the future.

Louisiana incarcerates youth at much higher rates than the national average and detains them in youth prisons well documented for physical and sexual abuse, excessive use of solitary confinement, and high recidivism. This high rate of juvenile incarceration has disproportionately impacted African American youth. As of 2019, although African American children made up only 38% of the state's youth population, they accounted for 79% of all youth incarcerated in Louisiana.

Louisiana, one of the poorest states in the nation, continues to waste taxpayer dollars by spending \$156,570 annually to detain a single child. This cost is 13 times more than what it takes to educate that same child in Louisiana's public schools (\$11,722 per year) and exceeds the combined cost of full-time tuition, housing, and books at Tulane University and Louisiana State University (\$106,849 per year). Despite these staggering figures, the state legislature recently approved several bills that will incarcerate even more children, keep them detained longer, and limit their opportunities for early release.

The SPLC's report, Only Young Once, provides the Legislature with a series of policy reforms, recommending that Louisiana shift its focus from punitive methods to therapeutic and community-based approaches. These reforms would not only offer a safer and more humane system for Louisiana's youth but also result in significant cost savings for Louisiana taxpayers.

Newly Enacted Laws Negatively Impacting Juvenile Justice

- SB 3 (Act 13) mandates that 17-year-olds alleged to have committed a delinquent act be charged as an adult and subjected to adult prison if found guilty.
 - This repeals 2016's "Raise the Age" law, which mandated that the state prosecute 17-year-olds under the juvenile system, with exceptions for those accused of serious crimes.
- HB 1 (Act 15) created a "Truth and Transparency" program that requires clerks of court to provide public electronic access to some criminal court records of teenagers accused of serious crimes, including but not be limited to the name

Federal Recommendations

Strengthen the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)

- **Mandate Compliance with Core Protections:** Require all states to comply with the core protections of JJDP, such as ensuring children accused of status offenses (violations that would not be a crime if committed by an adult, such as skipping school) are not placed in detention facilities and reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.
- **Expand Protections:** Introduce amendments to the JJDP that further protect incarcerated youth, such as prohibiting solitary confinement in state facilities and ensuring that children under the age of 18 are never detained with adults.

Support for Community-Based Alternatives

- Increase funding for community-based alternatives to incarceration that specifically target minority youth, providing them with resources and support in their own communities rather than in detention facilities.

of the child, arrest details, custody or bail decisions, and court dates, among other facts associated with the case.

For more information contact Terry C. Landry Jr., SPLC Louisiana Policy Director, at terry.landry@splcenter.org or visit splcenter.org.