

Governor Phil Murphy

# Acting Governor Oliver Signs Legislation Establishing Juvenile Justice Pilot Program

08/11/2021

**TRENTON** – Acting Governor Sheila Oliver today signed legislation (S2924/A4663) creating a two-year “Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities” pilot program in the Juvenile Justice Commission at the Office of the Attorney General. This legislation appropriates \$4.2 million in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023, for a total of \$8.4 million over two years, to the Juvenile Justice Commission to assist with the process of reintegrating young people released from juvenile facilities back into their communities, aiming to prevent initial and/or repeated involvement with the youth justice system.

This legislation will support the Juvenile Justice Commission’s efforts to modify New Jersey’s current youth justice policies to adopt a more restorative and transformative approach with regards to prevention and reintegration. This program will develop innovative restorative and transformative justice continuums of care in four target cities—Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton. The programs will include two components: community-based enhanced reentry wraparound services and restorative justice hubs. Community-based enhanced reentry wraparound services will include various social support services, such as employment assistance and mentoring services, while restorative justice hubs will be physical spaces within the community where youth and families can heal, reconnect and build healthy relationships, and help resolve local conflicts through dialogue instead of punitive measures.

“A stronger and fairer New Jersey begins, in many ways, with our young people,” **said Acting Governor Sheila Oliver, who also serves as the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs.** “It is essential that we not only invest in our communities but also in our youth. Every child, regardless of their zip code, deserves a chance to succeed and reach their full potential. This bill is bringing us closer to that realization in New Jersey.”

“New Jersey is a national leader in reforming its juvenile justice system, and that’s in part because of innovative programs like the one signed into law today,” **said Acting Attorney General Andrew Bruck.** “I commend Governor Murphy and Acting Governor Oliver for partnering with a broad range of stakeholders to design this pilot program and look forward to working with our Juvenile Justice Commission to assist with implementation.”

“As a result of strong and collaborative partnerships, New Jersey’s youth justice system has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past fifteen years, marked by a dramatic reduction in the number of youth incarcerated in our state. The Juvenile Justice Commission is proud to be a leader in these ongoing reform efforts aimed at improving outcomes for youth, families, and communities,” **said Jennifer LeBaron, Ph.D., Acting Executive Director of the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.** “And today, the JJC is proud to be part of this new initiative that makes an additional investment in our youth – an initiative that represents a significant expansion of funding for community-based programs. Through the Restorative and Transformative Youth Justice Pilot Program, youth in communities most impacted by the justice system will be presented with new opportunities for growth and development and critical social supports that will both help to prevent system involvement and ensure a successful transition home following placement with the JJC.”

Primary sponsors of the legislation include Senators Shirley Turner and Nellie Pou, and Assemblymembers Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Anthony Verrelli, Shanique Speight, and Shavonda Sumter.

“Restorative justice and transformative justice programs have been nationally recognized as the best practices in keeping young people out of the criminal justice system and successfully reintegrating them into their communities after being released from out-of-home placements,” **said Senator Shirley Turner.** “This program will develop innovative

restorative and transformative justice continuums of care in Camden, Newark, Paterson and Trenton that offer both individual support services and spaces to foster systemic change. I look forward to seeing the impact this program has on our communities. It is crucial we are doing everything in our power to redirect these young adults onto the right path to avoid further involvement in the criminal justice system.”

“When our young people leave juvenile justice facilities and return to society, too many of them are ill-equipped to meet the challenges they will face. Too often they fall through the cracks because of underfunded, over-burdened community-based services,” **said Senator Nellie Pou.** “This law will help us think more creatively about the concept of juvenile justice, especially for those most at-risk. It seeks to create restorative justice hubs with wrap-around services that will enable these young people not only to survive upon their release, but to thrive and grow and become positive, productive citizens.”

“This pilot program will help find new ways to transform our youth justice system during the current public health crisis and beyond. COVID-19’s impact on our communities and the fervent calls for racial equality demand changes in the way our state implements justice. Only once we acknowledge the inequalities and failures of our current system can we begin to find better solutions to the challenges we face,” **said Assembly sponsors Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Anthony Verrelli, Shanique Speight, and Shavonda Sumter in a joint statement.** “Rather than relying on incarceration and punitive measures, New Jersey needs a community-based plan of action that embraces restorative and transformative justice practices. We must place an emphasis on the social and emotional rehabilitation of young people, their families and their community members if we are to succeed in our goal. It’s time to look at how we can make real, lasting change in our communities and lift up our young men and women to break the cycle of incarceration and recidivism.”

“This legislation is a tremendous victory as we begin to shift funds – and our mindset – from investing in our kids’ failure to investing in their success,” **said Andrea McChristian, Director of Law & Policy at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.** “This legislation will be transformative for young people of color in New Jersey whose lives have been devastated by our broken youth justice system. It is an important step toward our larger goal of closing all three of New Jersey’s youth prisons and meaningfully investing dollars into the communities disproportionately harmed by youth incarceration.”

“Now that I serve a congregation and the community of Trenton this initiative is more personally meaningful than ever. Restorative Justice Hubs are the community imagined alternative to punitive responses to our young people’s trauma,” **said Reverend Charles Boyer.** “This law is historic for our state as we look to support youth and affirm their humanity and care. I am so grateful for the young people, the community leaders, The NJ Institute for Social Justice, the sponsors, the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor for their commitment to the well-being of our children.”

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